THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

W. O. MITCHELL'S CRAFT OF FICTION

by

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "W. O. Mitchell's Craft of Fiction" submitted by James H. Bell in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this thesis are to examine how and how well W. O. Mitchell meets the compositional demands presented by the kinds of novels he has chosen to create in Who Has Seen the Wind, The Kite, and The Vanishing Point, and thus to reach a description and evaluation of some distinctive features of Mitchell's craft of fiction in his novels.

The first chapter of the thesis serves as an introduction to the topic by stating the purposes to be achieved, defining the critical method to be employed, and arguing the suitability of the method given the current state of Mitchell studies and the purposes of this thesis.

The middle three chapters of this thesis are devoted to detailed examination of the novels according to the critical method outlined. Thus the following three questions provide the organization for each chapter. First, what kind of novel is it, or, more specifically, what is the plot and the form of the plot? Then, what compositional demands do the kind of novel and the constituent elements of the novel present? Finally, how and how well are the selected compositional demands met in an effort to maximize the effectiveness of the whole?

The conclusion finds that W. O. Mitchell's writing talents do not show to best advantage in his novels. The weaknesses of his writing, such as the difficulty creating convincing, sympathetic middle-class males and the lack of success portraying women in sufficient complexity for their roles, are emphasized by the kind of novels Mitchell has chosen to write in The Kite and The Vanishing Point. Conversely, the strengths

of his writing often become liabilities in the novelistic context in which they appear. The tall tales, the optimistic themes, and the romantic characterizations fit uncomfortably into a traditional realistic novel format, creating works in which the parts are greater than the whole.

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CHAPTER I

The purposes of this thesis are to examine how and how well W. O. Mitchell meets the compositional demands presented by the kinds of novels he has chosen to create in Who Has Seen the Wind, The Kite, and The Vanishing Point, and thus to reach in the final chapter a description and evaluation of some distinctive features of Mitchell's craft of fiction in his novels.

The critical method employed asks three basic questions of each work. What kind of novel is it? What compositional demands do the kind of novel and the constituent elements of the novel present? How and how well are the compositional demands met in an effort to maximize the effectiveness of the whole? Novels are of two kinds, mimetic and didactic, and, if mimetic, then either comic or tragic.[1] The distinction between mimetic and didactic works is fundamental, the didactic seeking to teach, and the mimetic, to entertain. While the two kinds of works are easy to distinguish in theory--the one arguing and instructing, the other imitating and pleasing--they are more difficult to distinguish in practice, for a didactic work may imitate and delight, while a mimetic work may have much to teach. A work is didactic when the thesis argued is the primary organizing principle, when the materials are selected, ordered, and rendered in the main according to the dictates of the case to be made. A work is mimetic when the materials are selected, ordered, and rendered in the main "to move our feelings powerfully and pleasurably in a certain definite way."[2] The difference between didactic and mimetic works may be refined using the following distinctions. The "plot" of a didactic work is generally a series of incidents united in their contribution to propounding the doctrine; the plot of a mimetic work is generally a temporal synthesis of action, character, and thought united in maximizing the emotional impact. A didactic work employs actions to arouse certain emotions toward its doctrine, thus inculcating the desired moral stance; a mimetic work employs our moral stance toward certain characters in certain incidents to ensure our emotional involvement. A didactic work is complete when it has presented its case; a mimetic work is complete when it has resolved the action with which it began.

Mitchell's novels are mimetic. Who Has Seen the Wind is Brian O'Connel's struggle to understand the ultimate meaning of life. The gripping force of the novel comes not from the progressive revelation of the meaning of life but from the successes and failures of Brian's struggle. The novel concludes not with Brian's discovery of the answer to the puzzle of human existence but with his vow to continue the quest. The Vanishing Point is organized by Carlyle's successful quest for Victoria, a search which is the outward manifestation of Carlyle's inner quest for his natural self. The novel's outstanding structural characteristic reveals dramatically the centrality of Carlyle's growth. The Vanishing Point is divided into three parts, the second section breaking the chronological development of Carlyle's search for Victoria, not to argue for one of the novel's themes such as the importance of love, but to trace Carlyle's growth during his first nine years in Paradise Valley. The Kite is also a mimetic novel, organized by David Lang's successful quest for a magazine article, a search which is the outward manifestation of his successful inner quest for his natural self and for a more beneficial concept of time. The Kite, however, has a particularly strong didactic impulse. The series of speculations as to Daddy Sherry's so-called secret to a long and full life provides the novel with a didactic structure, and the novel concludes with pronouncements from both Daddy and David as to Daddy's secret. The mimetic structure, however, dominates the didactic largely because of the first two chapters of the novel. These chapters establish David as the protagonist, they define David's principal problem as his deleterious concept of time, and they propose the solution: David should return to his roots and come to know Daddy Sherry, who has the awareness of his own mortality which David lacks. Thus the early chapters of The Kite establish David's quest as the novel's central organizing principle. Because Mitchell's novels are quite clearly mimetic, Chapters II, III, and IV of this thesis do not argue directly for the mimetic nature of the works, but concentrate on ascertaining what kind of mimetic novel each work is.

Mimetic novels are comic or tragic or a mixture of comedy and tragedy. Broadly defined, "comic" and "tragic" describe the well-known happy and sad endings, and this is the general sense in which the terms are used here. Because Mitchell's fiction is not tragic, I will elaborate only on the comic. More specifically defined, a comic novel is one in which a deserving protagonist is finally included in a society to which he naturally belongs. Here comic does not mean funny. Nor does it refer to the "comic spirit" where the actions of men are perceived sympathetically as they fall short of the ideal. Nor is it a genre term. It does, however, refer indirectly to the genre of dramatic comedy because much of the modern fiction which we describe as comic descends from dramatic comedy. Northrop Frye summarizes the action of dramatic comedy as follows:

> What normally happens is that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually parental, and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will.[3]

The movement is from one society to a better society, the happy change being celebrated by weddings, banquets, and, sometimes, the ritual expulsion of a scapegoat. While the genre of dramatic comedy stands behind modern comic fiction, comic means, more broadly defined, that the hero gains the society to which he rightly belongs, and, most broadly defined, that the ending is a happy one.

Another term besides "tragic" and "comic" used in discussing the emotional impact of a novel is "form." Form is generally defined in literary studies as a work's "essential organizing principle."[4] Thus to call the emotional "'working or power'" of a mimetic novel its form is sensible because a mimetic work is designed primarily to move our emotions.[5] The form then is the pattern of our hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, throughout the novel. However, because the most prominent part of the emotional pattern is the climax, which is described in terms of comedy and tragedy, the form of a novel is often described as comic or tragic, depending solely on the climax.

The element of fiction primarily responsible for the form of a mimetic novel is plot. The form of the plot is the crucial element in mimetic novels and a key concept in the critical method of this study. Plot is used here not in the ordinary sense of a sequence of actions but in the enlarged sense of the "temporal synthesis . . . of action, character, and thought."[6] This expanded definition of plot is of great benefit, for it acknowledges, accommodates, and accounts for what we as readers realize, that there are plots of character and plots of thought as well as the traditionally recognized plots of action. Furthermore, by including character in the definition, a moral and emotional element is added which we know is present when we read: we feel animosity for some characters and wish them ill; we feel affection for some characters and wish them well.

Determining the plot involves identifying the protagonist, the character "who undergoes the major change," describing the protagonist's initial state, and then following the protagonist's changes, paying particular attention to the climactic change in character, thought or fortune.[7] "Character" refers to the protagonist's goals and behavior, and it is revealed when he decides upon a certain course of action and when, unless stopped by forces beyond his control, he accomplishes or begins to accomplish his intent. "Thought" refers to the protagonist's ideas and knowledge, and it is usually revealed omnisciently or through speech. "Fortune" refers to the protagonists' honour, goods, loved-ones, and general well-being, and it is revealed by what happens to him and his plans. Determining the form of the plot involves identifying our response to the protagonist's character and thought, and our hopes and fears for his fortune. It also requires recognizing the direction of the protagonist's changes and estimating the degree to which he is responsible for these changes.

The second step in the critical method is to consider the form of the plot and the outstanding constituent elements of the novel and to identify some basic compositional demands which these present.

The third step is to analyze in what ways, and with what success, the author meets the compositional demands in his effort to maximize the form of the plot.

This critical method is well suited to the intention of this thesis to describe and evaluate W. O. Mitchell's craft of fiction because the critical method focuses directly on the novels. Critical modes can be distinguished by the degree to which they focus on the author, the audience, the universe (the world outside the work), or the work itself.[8] Analyses of the author, audience, and universe are oblique approaches to Mitchell's craft of fiction. The critical approach employed here examines directly the tools of the writer's craft: action, character, theme, point of view, setting, symbolism, and the other elements of fiction. Yet it includes something of the author, the audience, and the universe. The author is included in that an inference is made from the text that he attempted to craft a particular kind of novel, say, a comedy rather than a tragedy, or a serious comedy rather than a sentimental one. The audience is included in so far as a general response to a work is inferred, say, happiness at the success of a hero's quest, and more specific responses throughout a work are inferred, say, concern when the hero's life is endangered. The universe is considered in this study to varying degrees depending on the didactic propensity of the work. The didactic element must be considered because it influences the emotional power of a novel. For example, if a protagonist's insight is intended to provide a comic high point, but his insight is unsupported by events in the novel and seems simplistic outside the world of the novel, then the reader's reaction will be negative rather than positive. The didactic element is also considered because it is more powerfully conveyed as the form of the plot is more effectively developed, and a critic would be irresponsible--at least narrow--if he praised the power of a mimetic work which conveyed powerfully an objectionable message, and he did not appraise the message.

This critical method is also particularly appropriate because the scarcity of criticism on Mitchell's novels suggests that a basic critical approach is required. The dearth of criticism on Mitchell's work is noted in Dick Harrison's 1977 study of prairie fiction: "W. O. Mitchell . . . is acknowledged as a major prairie writer yet . . . [his] work has received little attention aside from finding a place in general studies."[9] Ken Mitchell and Robin Mathews have published essays on Who Has Seen the Wind, and Ronald Sutherland and William New have written articles comparing the novel with L'Avalée and The Kite respectively. Catherine McLay has published the only article devoted to The Kite, and she and Danald Bartlett have both published essays on The Vanishing Point.[10] With so little published criticism, a basic approach to Mitchell's novels is needed. If a primary function of criticism is the pursuit among scholars of the most profitable understanding of a work, then the initial studies should establish such fundamental issues as the form of the plot, the roles of the characters, the meanings of prominent symbols, and so forth. Only when such basic understandings are established with a reasonable degree of confidence can more specific studies such as extremely close readings and more general studies such as surveys of trends in regional or national literature be conducted with justified assurance.

Chapters II, III, and IV are organized according to this critical method. Each chapter outlines the plot of the novel to be studied, identifies the form of the plot, selects several basic compositional demands, and then analyzes in detail how and how well these literary problems are solved. Chapter V describes and evaluates some prominent characteristics of Mitchell's craft of fiction in his novels.

CHAPTER II

The essential story which W. O. Mitchell tells in Who Has Seen the Wind is that of a boy's growth in character and thought from a naturally egocentric and ignorant four year-old to a responsible and more knowledgeable twelve year-old. At four years of age, the youngster, Brian O'Connal, has almost no understanding of birth and death, he has a primitive conception of God, and he has no sense of responsibility. When Brian visits the Reverend Mr. Hislop and the Presbyterian church looking for God to punish his grandmother, he is exposed to a more sophisticated conception of God. Then, in acquiring a pet baby pigeon which dies, he learns something about birth and death. When Brian starts school, his clash with the teacher is instrumental in his abandoning the notion of God as a hovering, vengeful disciplinarian. Brian replaces this notion with "'the feeling,'" a surge of emotion, first of transcendental beauty, and then of increasing uneasiness as it fails to accommodate death.[1] The death of his dog, Jappy, leaves Brian disconsolate. At ten years of age, Brian is frustrated and annoyed that "the feeling" will not lead him to knowledge of the meaning of life. During his stay on his Uncle Sean's farm, Brian learns the love of imperfection and, in attempting to walk back to town, he experiences his aloneness in a night on the prairie. When Brian's father dies, Brian concludes that nature is forever, man but temporary, and that every person is alone; whereupon he realizes and gladly shoulders his responsibility, going to help his mother and the rest of his family. Brian's subsequent relationship with his grandmother dramatizes his deep respect for the individual and emphasizes his subconscious recognition of the inevitability of death in life. Brian concludes with his vow to discover the meaning of life.

The form of the plot is neither strongly comic nor strongly tragic. The mixture of comedy and tragedy is created throughout Who Has Seen the Wind by the comic climaxes of Part One and Part Three and the tragic climax of Part Two. Part One is comic because a little boy feels a sense of completion and culmination when he is reunited with the puppy he treasures. Part Two is tragic because the dog's death climaxes a series of deaths which Brian is too immature to accommodate. Part Three is comic because Brian's solution to his emptiness and to his and others' aloneness is to accept the responsibility of helping people, a momentous, positive change in character. A mixture of comedy and tragedy is created in Part Four because Brian's growth in character is comic but his development in thought is primarily tragic. In Brian's impressive growth in character, he abandons the egocentricity of childhood and accepts the responsibility of adulthood. In his intellectual development, Brian struggles to understand the role of death in life, but he never succeeds. More importantly, his searching becomes misguided. While he believes rightly that what he calls "the feeling" will lead him toward the meaning of life, he stops getting "the feeling," and at the novel's conclusion he is trying to solve the mystery of life intellectually.

This form of the plot presents numerous compositional demands, of which I will examine five which seem basic and crucial. First, if the comedy and the tragedy are to have power, we must care about the protagonist. This is a particularly important problem in a novel of maturing, such as Who Has Seen the Wind, where the protagonist must be initially wanting or flawed so that he may improve, but not flawed in such a way that he alienates our sympathies or interest. To engage the reader, especially at the beginning, in a flawed, immature character is a necessary condition for the success of the novel. Second, if the comedy and tragedy are to have power, the protagonist's development must be clear. If we do not know what Brian is like initially, and if we do not know what he is like finally, then we do not know how much or how little progress he has made, and he cannot inspire in us happiness for his success or sorrow for his failure. Third, the mixture of tragedy and comedy must be appropriate and effective. Given Mitchell's proposal to present Brian's struggle "sympathetically," an appropriate mixture is a near balance of comedy and tragedy but tipped in favour of comedy (W, p. ix). Achieving such a mixture in Part Four of Who Has Seen the Wind is particularly a problem because the first three parts of the novel are either strongly comic or tragic. A suitable mixture of comedy and tragedy might be achieved but be mechanical and lifeless, thus the stipulation that it be artistically effective. Fourth, if the reader is to read through to the end, the story of a child must be made interesting to adults. This would be a fairly easy condition to meet if the child were a prodigy or his life were exotic and exciting, but Mitchell tries to interest us in a fairly ordinary youngster living in a parochial Canadian prairie town and growing up with such ordinary experiences as starting grade one.

There is another compositional problem to consider. Who Has Seen the Wind has a strong subplot which demands integrating with the plot. This subplot is primarily the story of an intolerant and iron-willed lady's evil influence and of her eventual defeat. Mrs. Abercrombie's "evil force in the town" is evident when she is instrumental in causing the resignation of the sincere and broadminded Presbyterian minister, Mr. Hislop (W, p. 48). When the town's "scarlet woman" covers the windows of her shack at Christmas with red tissue paper she thinks festive but Mrs. Abercrombie finds immoral, Mrs. Abercrombie demands that the woman remove the offending paper or be struck from the Presbyterian Christmas hamper list (W, p. 26). When the woman refuses, Mr. Hislop successfully opposes Mrs. Abercrombie, and Mrs. Abercrombie seeks revenge. Her campaign of revenge succeeds when a letter from the Ladies' Auxiliary protesting Mr. Hislop's Papist leanings as evidenced by the candles in the C.G.I.T. procession leads to his discouragement and resignation. Later Mrs. Abercrombie joins with Mr. Powelly, Mr. Hislop's pious and strong-willed successor, to orchestrate a "campaign of Personal Visitation to Bring Souls to the Mercy Seat" (W, pp. 103-104). The salient convert is the town ne'er-do-well, the Ben, who joins the church in order to find a safe place for his still. When his still blows up during a church service and he manages to remove the evidence before the law arrives, Mr. Powelly and Mrs. Abercrombie seek revenge. The Ben is eventually jailed, but his son, the Young Ben, who is sought primarily to make the revenge sweeter for these pillars of society, proves more difficult to capture. Meanwhile, Mrs. Abercrombie's pernicious influence is also manifest in her daughter's bigoted whispering campaigns against two Chinese children, and the cruel boycott of the Chinese girl's birthday party. A new teacher, Miss Thompson, unsuccessfully opposes this racism. Prominent citizens are also involved in the callous treatment of the Wongs: they resist granting the family welfare, and they finally send the two children away, whence Mr. Wong, bereft and alone, hangs himself. Mrs. Abercrombie's eventual defeat comes at a school board meeting when she confronts Mr. Digby, the school principal, with a list of his professional shortcomings, the foremost being his release of the freedom-loving Young Ben a year before the legal school-leaving age. She offers to disregard such transgressions if he will sentence the Young Ben to "an institution of correction" (W, p. 284). Miss Thompson, her engagement to the local doctor just broken, comes to Digby's aid, exposes the scheme for revenge on the Ben, denounces Mrs. Abercrombie's treatment of the Wongs, and storms out of the meeting, resigning in the process. As the board begins to turn against Mrs. Abercrombie, she panics, attempts to get her way by threatening to resign, and is forced to hand in her resignation when the Board opposes her and calls her bluff. Such a prominent subplot creates the problem of unity. If the subplot unites with the plot, almost all elements of the novel work to maximize the power of Brian's growth. If the subplot does not reinforce the plot, prominent superfluous material distracts our attention and enervates the form of the plot.

The artistic success of Who Has Seen the Wind hinges in large part on the successful solution of these five compositional problems.

The first compositional demand--that Brian engage our concern, especially early in the novel--is answered by giving Brian many appealing and laudable traits and by devoting Part One to dramatizing these. We care what happens to Brian because we like him. Brian engages our affection because he is a spirited, amusing four-year-old with an intense desire to learn. Generally, we admire spirit. We also recognize the necessity of learning and generally consider enthusiasm in the task an attractive attribute. Similarly, we appreciate humour and generally find people who are amusing more likeable than those who are not.

Brian's spirited nature is evident in his search for God. Learning from his playmate Forbsie that God lives in the Presbyterian Church, Brian immediately convinces Forbsie to show him where the church is, and, when Forbsie deserts him near the church, Brian confidently knocks on God's door. Receiving no answer, Brian unhesitatingly approaches Mrs. Hislop at the manse:

> "I guess God isn't anywhere around."
> "Why--what do you mean?"
> "That's his house, isn't it?"
> "Yes."
> "I'm going to see Him." (W, p. 9)

Brian's attempts to meet God emphasize his intense desire to learn. Although Brian initially hopes to have God punish his grandmother for bossing him around, Brian's desire for revenge fades at the prospect of knowledge. When Mr. Hislop takes Brian into the house of the Lord, Brian is full of questions, not vengeance.

> "Is God busy right now?"
> "Yes. He's busy. Just what did you have in mind?"
> "Where--where is He? That's just His picture--all grapes and bloody."
> "Lemon-colored, too," pointed out Mr. Hislop. "Why do you want to see--"
> "What are those--with things to their backs--wings?" (W, p. 23)

The conversation continues with Brian's barrage of inquiries about angels and God's work. Mr. Hislop's unsuccessful attempts to remind Brian of why he sought God in the first place stress that Brian's desire for knowledge is immeasurably stronger than his desire for revenge.

Brian also engages our affection because, while we take him seriously, he is often amusing. Of Brian's two major actions in Part One, his search for God and his acquisition of a puppy, the former is broadly humorous. The amusement arises from the disparity between Brian's perception of God and the general adult understanding of God. While adults conceive of God as abstract, Brian sees Him as concrete, a special man who lives in a special house raising sheep and sheep pups. When Brian confirms that God is actually in heaven, he attempts to make a pair of angel wings in order to visit. While the general adult conception is of God as an omnipotent force not catering to human whims, Brian's God is a personal one who changes with Brian's mood. When Brian is angry at Grandma MacMurray, God is vengeful; when Brian is lonely because Forbsie is sick, God is a playmate.

Besides the broadly humorous situation, there are innumerable humorous passages such as the following one:

> On the paper he [Brian] made blue with his crayon. And God was there. He made a yellow God, yellow for the round part, and green legs, and purple eyes, and red arms, and that was God. He made another God and another and another till there were Gods all over the paper. He added arms and more arms, legs and more legs: those were spider Gods, of course. (W, p. 32)

The simple, definite creation of Heaven, and the concreteness of God, particularly in vivid crayon colours, establish a humorous tone. But Brian's conception of God is uncertain. After the apparent finality of "and that was God," Brian makes more and more gods. Then Brian goes further, adding a multitude of arms and legs. The reader realizes that Brian has strayed from God to gods to goodness knows what. Brian, however, knows: "spider Gods, of course." While "spider Gods" is humorous as an unsuspected resolution to Brian's little problem, the "of course" is particularly so because it underlines the certainty of the child's egocentric world compared to the adult world. It is worth noting that the humour of Part One is not primarily slapstick, or tall tales, or one-liners, or colourful language. Four-year-old Brian is amusing because his natural egocentricity and ignorance are life-like, intense, and juxtaposed with adult reality.

Brian's age generally justifies any less-than-laudable character traits. If more than age is needed as a justification, it is supplied. For example, when Brian panics his elders by disappearing to the garage to sleep with his puppy, he violates the novel's tenet of consideration for people; therefore, sufficient justification for his action is supplied so that our sympathies are not alienated. Brian's pup was banned from the house for no particular offense. In fact, on the occasion on which he was banned, Grandma MacMurray was guilty, the pup innocent. Brian's father sided with Brian and the pup, as indicated by his joking at Grandma MacMurray's expense. Grandma "chose to be hurt," and, to "mollify her mother's feelings," Mrs. O'Connal barred the pup from the house (W, p. 42). Tied up in the garage, the pup cried until Brian, inspired by thoughts of the nature-loving Young Ben, sneaked out of the house for a happy reunion with his pup. Because Brian is thus prevented from developing unappealing characteristics, and because he demonstrates numerous admirable qualities, our attachment to him is encouraged early in the novel.

The second compositional demand, that Brian's growth be clear, is effectively satisfied primarily because a series of deaths and "the feeling" chart Brian's growth in thought and character. Initially Brian is a spirited, amusing, and intensely curious four year-old with a primitive notion of God, almost no understanding of death, and no sense of social responsibility. In Part One Brian becomes aware of death. The death motif points to Brian's major change in Part One, and the figures of speech reinforce it. Initially, death means little to Brian. When his little brother, Bobbie, seems likely to die, it means nothing to him except that Bobbie receives more than his fair share of parental attention. When Brian kills a caterpillar and a spider, he does so without a thought. But when Brian's pet baby pigeon dies, the fact of death comes home to him. Brian's father, Gerald, answers his son's questions about the bird's death as best he can, and he shows Brian how to bury the bird. The symbolic section ending Part One emphasizes that death now has meaning for Brian. Part of the emphasis comes from the contrast between this prairie scene and Brian's idyllic first time on the prairie. When Brian first wandered past the town limits, he was enamoured with the beauty of the prairie, and oblivious to the menace, as a "suave-winged hawk" circled above a gopher sitting by his "pulpit hole" and "[squeaking] questioningly" at Brian (*W*, p. 11). The hawk and the gopher reappear at the end of Part One representing the fact of death in life: "[A] lonely goshawk hung. It drifted in lazing circles. A pause --one swoop--galvanic death to a tan burgher no more to sit amid his city's grained heaps and squeak a question to the wind" (*W*, pp. 60-61). The personification of the gopher declares that death is as much a fact for people as for animals, and the shift from the past tense to a sentence with no tense makes the point that the fact of death is eternal. While Brian's concept of death is not as sophisticated as the understanding of death presented figuratively at the end of Part One, the awareness of death which Brian acquires in Part One is the requisite first step toward such an understanding.

In Part Two Brian fundamentally changes his conception of God, but his new conception is unable to accommodate a series of deaths. He changes from seeing God as a menacing disciplinarian to seeing Him in the beauty of nature. Brian's conflict with his grade one teacher, Miss MacDonald, dramatizes his view of God as a vengeful tyrant. When Brian lies about washing his hands, Miss MacDonald warns him that God punishes liars, and Brian is so terrified that he collapses. Not until Christmas approaches is "the frightening conception of an avenging God . . . replaced by a friendlier image borrowing its physical features from Santa Claus, its spiritual gentleness from his father" (W, p. 98). The important change comes when Brian sees God as manifest in what he considers the beauty of the world. Brian believes that God inspires the feeling he gets from various things in his environment, and he expects this feeling to lead him to understand the meaning of life. The first time that Brian identifies "the feeling," its religious nature is clear. Brian is sitting on the porch steps on Sunday contemplating the special quality of Sundays:

> A twinkling of light caught his eye; and he turned his head to see that the new, flake leaves of the spirea were starred in the sunshine--on every leaf were drops that had gathered during the night. He got up. They lay limpid, cradled in the curve of the leaves, each with a dark lip of shadow under its curving side and a star's cold light in its pure heart. As he bent more closely over one, he saw the veins of the leaf magnified under the perfect crystal curve of the drop. The barest breath of a wind stirred at his face, and its caress was part of the strange enchantment too. (W, p. 107)

The use of "twinkling" and "starred" and "star's" together with the personification of the dew with "lip," "side," and "heart," as well as the use of "cradled" in the context of Brian's Sabbath meditations, evoke associations with the Christ child in the manger. The religious association is encouraged by the mention of the wind, the pervasive symbol of God in the novel, and encouraged further by the wind's personification in "[t]he barest breath of a wind." Brian's recognition of the religious nature of his experience is made explicit when the O'Connals go to church and Brian responds to the congregation's singing: "Holy, holy, holy, they sang. That meant unbelievably wonderful--like his raindrop--a holy holy holy drop lying holy on a leaf. . . . The feeling he'd had was holy . . ." (W, pp. 111-112). This is indeed "a turning point in Brian O'Connal's spiritual life" (W, p. 106).

The gradual change in the quality and frequency of "the feeling" in the face of a series of deaths charts Brian's change from being filled with the "unbelievably wonderful" feeling to "an emptiness that [is not] to be believed" (W, p. 111, p. 181). After Brian's Sunday transcendental vision, for some time he experiences a similar exultation:

> The wind could do this to him, when it washed through poplar leaves, when it set telephone wires humming and twanging down an empty prairie road, when it ruffled the feathers on one of Sherry's roosters standing forlorn in a bare yard, when it carried to him the Indian smell of a burning straw stack. (W, pp. 122-123)

In one sentence Mitchell describes Brian's contact with God, as symbolized by the wind, through the senses of sight, sound, smell, and touch. Brian is similarly moved by a bucksaw whining, a crow calling, bread baking, and by a toad, leaf mold, clover, and wolf willow. With the death of a gopher, however, "the feeling" changes in quality. When Brian, Bobbie, Forbsie, and Art drown out a gopher, Art tortures it by tearing off its tail. When the Young Ben mercifully kills the gopher and beats Art, Brian is filled with "the feeling" and "a sense of the justness, the rightness, the completeness" of the Young Ben's action (W, pp. 127-128). As far as Brian's conscious understanding is concerned, the rightness is in Art's punishment, not in the gopher's death, as is revealed when Brian subsequently sees the decaying gopher:

> The feeling was in Brian now, fierce--uncontrollably so, with wild and unbidden power, with a new, frightening quality. . . . Prairie's awful, thought Brian, and in his mind there loomed vaguely fearful images of a still and brooding spirit, a quiescent power unsmiling from everlasting to everlasting to which the coming and passing of the prairie's creatures was but incidental. (W, pp. 128-129)

Later, when all of Forbsie's rabbits are drowned, Brian is "filled with a feeling of uncertainty and uneasiness" that reminds him of the time when Art pulled the tail from the gopher (W, p. 169). "'God isn't very considerate--is He, Gramma?'" Brian asks (W, p. 170). Although the horses at Thorborn's Livery Stable cause the "old lift of excitement," this is erased when Brian sees the dead, two-headed calf (W, p. 176). Brian is uneasy. He even doubts that what he feels is "the feeling." He experiences a sense of futility at the calf's short life. Brian then stops getting "the feeling." He briefly despairs of ever figuring things out, but he keeps trying to understand the why of the two-headed calf. Brian is struggling with this when Joe Pivott's dray crushes Brian's dog, Jappy--leaving Jappy struggling "in a futile circle," then dead; leaving Brian with "an emptiness that [is not] to be believed" (W, p. 179, p. 181).

In Part Three Brian learns the love of imperfection; he concludes that nature is permanent, man but temporary; he realizes people's inherent aloneness; and he accepts the social responsibility indicative of maturity. The first change is revealed during Brian's stay at his Uncle Sean's farm. When Brian's effort to make Annie more appealing to Ab by fixing her crossed eyes unexpectedly makes her less so, Brian realizes that the hiredman's attachment to Annie was based on her imperfection. This attachment, Brian recognizes, springs from the same source as Ab's affection for Noreen, "the snuffiest cow in the herd," and his own concern for the runt pig over all the other pigs in the litter (W, p. 229). Brian realizes that not only is it possible to love things or people in spite of their imperfections, it is often the case that people love things or other people because of them. Given Brian's previous insistence that things be "right" or perfect, this is a major revelation.

Brian's other important changes in Part Three are charted by the feeling and the death motifs. A visit to Saint Sammy revives "the feeling" in Brian, and it rekindles Brian's determination to discover the meaning of life, but it convinces him that he is not going to get any closer to that understanding "through a crazy man gone crazy from the prairie" (W, p. 199). Brian's frustration in his quest is demonstrated by his argument with Art about human reproduction. When Brian is forced to recognize the facts--although somewhat inaccurate and distorted--of human reproduction, he rants that it is not "right," he vandalizes a newly-poured sidewalk, he swears, and he renounces "the feeling": "The feeling [has] nothing to do with anything. It [isn't] any good" (W, p. 206). Although Brian seldom experiences the old exultation, when Maggie consoles him upon his father's illness, it arises again. For the first time "the feeling" is associated with human relations. It also arises in Brian when he leaves Sean's farm, attempts to walk to town, and spends a night in a haystack on the prairie where he feels vulnerable, defenseless, and alone. Upon waking in the morning, Brian has a vivid "experience of apartness . . .--a singing return of the feeling that . . . possessed him so many times in the past" (W, p. 237). The death of

Brian's father sparks important changes in Brian's thought and character. Standing bereft on the prairie, Brian thinks that nature is permanent, man but temporary. Nature, as represented by the prairie, exists forever, Brian reasons, but a man such as Brian's father exists for a short time, and, when he dies, he is gone forever, no longer having any connection with the living. Such thinking helps Brian realize that he is alone in life, that his mother is alone and lonely, and that all people are inherently alone. Brian thrills to the "fierce excitement" of "the feeling" for the last time as he makes his salient character change, accepting his responsibility and turning to help his mother and family.

Part Four substantiates Brian's climactic change in character and reveals his concluding development in thought. While the feeling and the death motifs map Brian's intellectual progress, explicit summary supported by domestic scenes make known Brian's social growth. The opening pages of Part Four summarize Brian's character development as a "growing consideration for the other members of the [O'Connal] family" and "a growing sense of responsibility" (W, p. 251, p. 252). Brian's relationship with his grandmother exemplifies the former. More specifically, the contrast between Brian's contentious relationship with his grandmother in Part One and his harmonious relationship with her in Part Four emphasizes Brian's growing respect for the individual. The contrast between Maggie's insistence that her mother stop knitting and keep the window closed, and Brian's recognition that his grandmother is no less a person for her advanced years and declining health, underlines Brian's increasing maturity. Brian's plans to become a "dirt doctor" announce that his "growing sense of responsibility" has grown beyond his family (W, p. 296, p. 252). His decision to become an agronomist, one of the most responsible career choices possible in depression Saskatchewan, is revealed in a fireside discussion when Maggie says to Sean: "'You seem to have put an idea in his head. . . . He's heard you say that the prairie's sick'" (W, p. 295). Brian's plans to make well the ailing source of life in the prairie provinces cap an impressive growth in character.

The final state of Brian's development in thought is charted by the death and feeling motifs and reinforced by indirect analysis through structure. Brian's participation in his grandmother's death discloses most dramatically his subconscious recognition of the inevitability of death in the cycle of life--a recognition which Brian struggles throughout the novel to make conscious. Brian subconsciously appreciated the role of death in life when he was four years old and his natural decision to bury the dead pigeon on the prairie created "a sudden relief; the sadness over the death of the baby pigeon lifted from him" (W, p. 59). Brian also revealed such an understanding when he felt "the justness, the rightness, the completeness" of the Young Ben's killing the tortured gopher and beating Art Sherry. Brian does not succeed, however, in making his subconscious understanding conscious, as his role in, and his response to, his grandmother's death reveal. The action is simply that Mrs. MacMurray is near death, Brian opens her bedroom window for her, and she dies. Brian does not cause his grandmother's death, for, as she knew, "her time had come" (W, p. 295). But the amplified significance of the window indicates that Brian facilitates the natural conclusion to Mrs. MacMurray's life. The open window is presented as Grandma MacMurray's contact with the social and natural worlds. While this is technically untrue because she still has contact with Maggie, Brian, and Bobbie, the novel presents it as the case, thus suggesting the open window as a symbol of Grandma MacMurray's living: "[N]ow it seemed that her years were but as yesterday; the little time that was left to her seemed as much as she had lived. Her world now was that of her window" (W, p. 277). When the window is open, Mrs. MacMurray maintains contact with the town and with "the softness of spring, the richness of summer, . . . the wild wine of fall," and, if the natural cycle is to be completed, death in winter (W, p. 277). The window closed is unnatural. It blocks out the sounds of the town, and the rippled glass distorts the clouds and the trees. When the window is closed, Mrs. MacMurray feels caged in an unappealing room of blank walls and medicine, and she feels attacked by the shadows from the glass. For Brian to open the window is to allow his grandmother to live--which naturally includes dying. When Grandma MacMurray's death finally comes, it is tied to natural things by the snow fall. Just as "[t]he eighty-two years of her life had imperceptibly fallen, moment by moment piling upon her their careless weight . . . ," so "the snow [falls] soundlessly, flake by flake piling up its careless weight" on the poplar tree outside her window (W, p. 277, p. 294). Just as "a twig would break off suddenly, relieve itself of a white burden of snow, and drop to earth," so Grandma MacMurray dies (W, p. 294). Yet instead of recognizing the natural necessity of his grandmother's death, Brian despairs: "Why did people die? Why did they finish up? What was the good in being human? It was awful to be human. It wasn't any good" (W, p. 298). Brian fails to make conscious his subconscious understanding of the role of death in life.

In Part Four "the feeling" marks Brian's growth by its absence. Brian believes that "the feeling" is the key to discovering the meaning of life, but he no longer experiences "the strange enchantment" (W, p. 107). He has "never had a return of the old excitement since he heard the meadow lark sing to him the day of his father's funeral" (W, p. 252). In fact, since that day, he has "seldom thought of the yearning that . . . harried him as long as he could remember" (W, p. 252). The loss of "the feeling" is unstartling because after the death of Brian's dog, "the feeling" came to Brian rarely: when he visited Saint Sammy, when Maggie consoled him upon Gerald's illness, when he awoke alone on the prairie, and finally when he turned to help his mother after Gerald's death. Hoping to recapture this exultant experience, Brian pays a brief visit to Saint Sammy, "[returning] sadly home" (W, p. 252). It is suggested that "[p]erhaps . . . the lustier interests" such as baseball and hockey are "defeating him" (W, p. 253). The sporadic nature of "the feeling" after Jappy's death and its elimination after Brian shoulders his social responsibility suggest that it is the series of deaths and the weight of responsibility which extirpate "the feeling." Milt Palmer's example and Mr. Digby's assessment suggest that it is because Brian has matured. When Brian asks Milt Palmer if he gets a feeling, Milt says, "'. . . I guess that ain't there no--more'" (W, p. 292). When Brian tells Mr. Digby, "'I don't get the feeling any more,'" Mr. Digby replies, "'Perhaps . . . you've grown up'" (W, p. 296, p. 297). Although Brian no longer experiences the transcendental exultation which he believes will lead him to the ultimate meaning of life, he receives renewed interest in his quest from a conversation with Mr. Digby:

> "I get the closest--I used to--when there's a feeling. Is there a feeling?"
> "Yes."
> "Then, I'm on the right track?"
> "I think you are."

> "A person can do it by feeling?"
> "That's the way," said Digby.
> "Then, I'm on the right track." Brian said it with conviction. (W, p. 294)

The sad fact is that while Brian hopes to find the answer through "the feeling," he no longer experiences this exciting enchantment, and there is little indication that he will.

The last time we see Brian he is walking on the prairie vowing again to discover the meaning of life, and trying to find the answer intellectually. The intercutting of descriptive passages of nature makes the point that while Brian struggles with the puzzle of existence, the answer surrounds him. His harsh despair that it is "awful to be a human" is followed immediately by a description of the "depthless softness" of the "[g]oose-gray" prairie sky "melting invisibly" into the snow-covered land (W, p. 298). Then Mitchell makes his point more directly. While Brian notices the rabbit, coyote, and prairie chicken tracks patterning the prairie, "[t]hese things [fill] his mind against his will"; he would rather think than notice the beauty of nature. When "[s]un glinting from a wild rosebush [catches] his eye," Brian looks more closely at the veined ice crystals on the leaves, and then gives the bush a kick, sending the frost to the ground. This behavior is markedly different from that which Brian displayed when the glint of light from a dew drop on a spirea leaf led him to a transcendental, "holy" experience (W, p. 112). The juxtaposition of his thinking and nature's beauty continues when Brian's thoughts on death and the meaning of life are followed by an enchanting description of "the moon pale in the afternoon sky, a gray ghost half-dissolved" and of the town "gray and low upon the horizon . . . swathed in bodiless mist" (W, p. 299). His vow to "find out completely and for good" is placed beside the beauty of sunlight glinting off dark plants by the roadside (W, p. 299). And, except for the present-tense concluding page, the following are the final two paragraphs:

> Some day. The thing could not hide from him forever.
>
> A startled jack rabbit leaped suddenly into the air ahead of him. Ears ridiculously erect, in seeking spurts now to one side, now to the other, it went bounding idiotically out over the prairie. (W, pp. 299-300)

For all Brian's progress, he is much like the jack rabbit.

Throughout Who Has Seen the Wind, Brian's changes in character and thought are clear without losing the sense of variety and spontaneity appropriate to human growth. Brian's development is clear principally because the death and feeling motifs chart Brian's changes. Yet the development is unmechanical because the motifs are not developed entirely predictably. Although the deaths, for example, are generally of increasing importance to Brian, this pattern is not followed rigidly, for the death of the rabbits affects Brian less than the earlier death of the gopher, and Grandma MacMurray's death is not as traumatic for Brian as the earlier death of his father. A sense of flexibility is also gained because more than the death and feeling motifs reveals Brian's changes. For example, the figurative language of the prairie scene concluding Part One measures Brian's growing awareness of death, and the juxtaposition of Brian's thought and nature's beauty near the end of Part Four comments on Brian's overall growth in thought. Thus Brian's development is manifest without being mechanical.

A third compositional demand which is successfully met is that of creating an appropriate and effective mixture of comedy and tragedy at the conclusion of Brian's growth. Given Mitchell's intention "to present sympathetically the struggle of a boy to understand . . . the ultimate meaning of the cycle of life," an appropriate mixture is a near balance of comedy and tragedy favouring the comedy (W, p. ix). An appropriate balance is maintained throughout because Part Two is tragic but Part One and Part Three are comic. A suitable balance is created in Part Four because Brian's growth in character is comic and his growth in thought is tragic. The powerful comic climax to Part Three enhances the comic element in the last part of the novel. The climactic character change at the end of Part Three is particularly effective because it resolves the principal tension of the plot in Part Two and Part Three. While Part One is primarily an introduction to Brian and the novel's themes, Part Two shows Brian's fall to disconsolation, and Part Three presents Brian's frustration and sudden success at rising above his problems. When Brian abandons his egocentricity and accepts his social responsibility, he resolves, at least temporarily, his turmoil at trying to accommodate a series of deaths and his frustration at failing to discover the secret of life.

Symbols heighten the power of this resolution. Such statements as "he stood alone in the silence that stretched from everlasting to everlasting" suggest that "silence" is people's existential aloneness (W, p. 247). Thus Brian's predicament acquires universal dimensions. The meadow lark that sings at Brian's turning to help his mother is a recurring symbol of the naturally good in life. Thus Brian's character change is as natural and right as the spring and rebirth with which the meadow lark is connected.

The comic resolution acquires more power because Brian's mother is characterized well enough so that we care what happens to her and are pleased that Brian goes to help her. Maggie is more complex than her role as a loving mother necessitates. While she loves her family as much as is possible, she is, in her own restrained words, "'a woman of some restraint'" (W, p. 96). Consequently, her love is not obvious until expressed in outbursts. For example, after Brian's disastrous first day at school, Maggie sits her son down for a reasonable talk, but she gushes, "'[Y]ou know that Mother loves you--that . . . Oh, Son, I don't want you to be a gowk!'" (W, p. 84). Brian is thrilled at the unusualness of his mother's outburst. Maggie also expresses her love by being overprotective. This trait is not constant, for she approves of Brian's friendship with the social misfit the Young Ben. Nor is the trait immutable. Although Maggie originally forbids Brian to have skates, she later permits him to have bobskates, and, when she sees the importance of tube skates, she rushes to get him those. We are pleased when Brian turns to helping his mother not merely because Maggie is complex enough to be believable but because she is complex in such a way that her love for her sons has not previously engendered the love in return which she deserves.

In contrast to the comedy, the tragedy of Brian's development is not emphasized with the power of a climax. The tragic elements are, however, effectively presented because the reader must discover them, and something worked out for oneself generally possesses more power and conviction than something one is told. Brian's thoughts reveal his failure to discover the meaning of life. He thinks that to be human is awful because people die. Also, while he thinks that the meaning of life has "something to do with dying" and "something to do with being born," he does not know what (W, p. 299). The final page of the novel puts

Brian's progress in perspective by presenting figuratively the understanding for which Brian strives. Similarly, no direct statement declares Brian misguided in his striving. In fact, Brian declares with conviction, "'. . . I'm on the right track'" (W, p. 294). Unfortunately, Brian is on the wrong track. If "the feeling" is the key to exploring the meaning of life, and if Brian no longer experiences "the feeling," then he will make little progress in discovering what he desires to know. This conclusion is reinforced when, in the novel's conclusion, Brian is determined to solve the puzzle of existence intellectually.

The balance of comedy and tragedy is also effectively presented because the comedy and tragedy are not starkly opposed but modified so that they blend. Brian's impressive character development, for example, is downplayed in the conclusion. One simple, obvious, but effective means of accomplishing this is the placing of the climax of Brian's character growth in Part Three. Then the fruits of Brian's change are presented in Part Four primarily in brief summary rather than extended scene, the more powerful form of presentation here. Thus we are told that Brian cultivates a "new and warmer relationship with his mother," and we are told that he teaches Bobbie to skate and swim, but we are shown only Brian's relationship with his grandmother (W, p. 251). Brian's successful character growth is downplayed further by the shifting of the focus at the end of the novel from his development in character to his development in thought. While Brian's development in character features in one page of conversation between Maggie and Sean about Brian's desire to become a "'dirt doctor,'" the philosophical issues examined variously by Mr. Digby, Milt Palmer, and Brian are the principal focus of concern (W, p. 295).

The tragedy is also softened. That Brian makes slight progress in understanding the place of death in life and that he is on the wrong track in his search for the answer are not as tragic as they may initially appear. Brian is only twelve years old. Seen in this light, the shortcomings of his philosophical inquiries are more natural than tragic. The tragedy of Brian's misguided searching is ameliorated because Brian inspires faith in the reader that he will eventually make considerable progress. The principal movement of Part Two and Part Three of the novel is Brian's descent to disconsolation and his rise to responsibility. If Brian can achieve such impressive growth in character, he might achieve equivalent results in his intellectual quest. Such an optimistic view of Brian's intellectual development is encouraged by his determination to continue his quest--this determination presented in the context of the novel's insistence that futility is the worst enemy.

The strongly comic resolutions to Part One and Part Three, and the strongly tragic conclusion to Part Two, produce pressure for an equally demonstrative resolution to Brian's growth. However, an inappropriate comic or tragic resolution is avoided and an appropriate mixture of comedy and tragedy is achieved by making Brian's character development largely comic, his intellectual development rather tragic, and his character growth the stronger by virtue of the comic climax to Part Three. Brian's comic character development is powerful because the climax of Part Three resolves, at least temporarily, the principal tension of the plot in Part Two and Part Three. The characterization of Maggie and the universalizing symbols heighten the power of the resolution. Brian's somewhat tragic intellectual development is effective because the reader must infer it from Brian's thoughts, from the symbols, from the structure, from Brian's loss of the feeling--in short, the reader must discover Brian's concluding state of intellectual development, even in the face of complimentary evaluations by Mr. Digby and confident declarations from Brian. The blending, not opposing, of the comic and tragic elements aids in the effective presentation of Brian's concluding state. Far from succumbing to the pressure from Part One, Part Two, and Part Three for a strongly comic--or possibly tragic--resolution, Part Four presents an appropriate and effective mixture of comedy and tragedy, thus co-opting the one tragic climax and the two comic climaxes as support from throughout the novel for the appropriate and effective mixture of the comic and the tragic presented in the conclusion of Brian's growth.

The intention "to present sympathetically the struggle of a boy to understand . . . the ultimate meaning of the cycle of life" suggests a fourth compositional problem: how to make the philosophical speculations of a child interesting to adults (W, p. ix). Structure and symbolism solve this problem by communicating with the reader above and beyond Brian. One example in detail will suffice. The opening of Who Has Seen the Wind puts Brian in a cosmic perspective of which he knows nothing--as the narrative moves from sky to prairie, to town, to house, to Brian under the kitchen table "imagining himself an ant" (W, p. 4). In reverse, the closing of the novel moves out past an ant about "to begin a long pilgrimage down the backbone spools" of "a small dog's skeleton," and out to "the far line of the sky" (W, p. 300). This movement does more than return to the perspective which opened the novel. The mention of a small dog's skeleton recalls Brian's dog, Jappy, and the personification in "pilgrimage" suggests that Brian is similar to the ant, a reading supported by our introduction to Brian "imagining himself an ant" and by the second last mention of an ant: "A strange lightness was in him [Brian], as though he were separated from himself and could see himself walking down the prairie trail. It was as though he watched an ant crawling up a stem . . ." (W, p. 4, p. 235). Yet to say that as the ant appears to humans so Brian appears to God is to simplify unduly, for there is more than perspective involved here. After Mr. Hislop makes it clear that God creates ants as well as everything else, ants are shown thriving on the carcass of the gopher which the Young Ben killed. This meaning of the ants as creatures which gain life from death is suggested again in the concluding image of the ant on the dog's skeleton. The marrying of this meaning and the meaning of the ant as Brian is a brilliant complexity which Brian does not perceive but which the reader may appreciate.

While this and the other compositional demands of the plot are met successfully, the subplot is not effectively united with the plot. Mitchell might have joined the subplot directly to the plot by having the characters and events of the subplot affect Brian's growth, but he does not do so. Of the four major events in the subplot, Brian does not even acknowledge that three of them occur. The Reverend Mr. Hislop resigns, overcome by the town's benumbing pettiness, and Brian does not notice. The Wong children are sent away, and their father hangs himself, but Brian shows no knowledge of the atrocity. The subplot culminates with the defeat of Mrs. Abercrombie and Mr. Powelly, and Brian gives no indication that he knows of the event. Only the Ben's imprisonment involves Brian. He hears a colourful version of the Ben's trial from Joe Pivott, and several times he sees the Ben suffering imprisonment.

The effect on Brian is obscure: watching the Ben pace "like all caged things," Brian feels that he is "seeing more than [is] actually before him" (W, p. 262). However, given the encouragement to extrapolate from the Ben to the Young Ben, to the captured owl, and to all caged things, it is reasonable to assume that seeing the Ben imprisoned played a part in Brian's opening his grandmother's bedroom window to free her from her confinement.

Given the minimal impact of subplot events on Brian, it is not surprising that the subplot characters have little influence on Brian's development. Miss MacDonald is the only character in the subplot who significantly affects the direction of Brian's growth. Miss MacDonald, or possibly merely attending school, is instrumental in taming Brian's free spirit. Although little is made of this change in Brian, it is revealed when Sean visits the O'Connal family near the end of Brian's grade one year. Bobbie has become the wild and daring one; Brian has grown increasingly tame and conservative. Through a rhyme Bobbie declares himself "'as wild as ever,'" and Brian primly corrects him: "'It's supposed to go--"wild as I can be" . . .'" (W, p. 116). When Bobbie gleefully swears "'I goddam am,'" "Brian [wishes] that he had been the one to say it" (W, p. 117). Miss MacDonald also affects the direction of Brian's growth when her threat that God will punish Brian for lying sparks in him a changed conception of God. Miss MacDonald inadvertently unleashes Brian's fear of an omnipotent, vengeful God, and Brian, unable to tolerate the terror, changes because of his natural sensitivity to seeing God in the beautiful in nature.

Although two other subplot characters, Saint Sammy and Mr. Digby, do not cause any change in the direction of Brian's development, they help

Brian continue his quest. When Brian is stymied in his search for the meaning of life, Saint Sammy once inspires the feeling which he had lost, and Brian regains the spirit to pursue his quest. At the same time, Brian decides that Saint Sammy's insanity is not the way to discover the meaning of life. Although Saint Sammy inspires Brian in his quest, he does not influence the direction of Brian's growth. Neither does Mr. Digby. Of the seven times that Digby and Brian are shown together, the first five are preparation for the important meeting at Palmer's when Mr. Digby inspires Brian to continue his quest. The first time that Brian and Mr. Digby meet, Brian is only four years old and on his way to meet God at the Presbyterian church. Mr. Digby is friendly and jocular. When Brian is six, he meets Digby under inauspicious circumstances in the principal's office. Digby is understanding but firm. Brian later sees Digby's love of freedom when the two happen upon the Ben's caged owl, and again when Digby releases the Young Ben from school a year ahead of the legal school-leaving age. Although Brian also sees Digby at one of Milt Palmer's shoe shop philosophy sessions, Brian is only interested in finding his little brother, Bobbie. When Brian walks in on another philosophy session, his thoughts reveal what influence Digby has had on him: "Why did his insides slip a notch whenever he saw Mr. Digby? thought Brian. He didn't act like a principal" (W, p. 291). Apparently Brian has grown to find Mr. Digby curiously special and possibly approachable. This philosophy session is different, for Brian participates. As he and Digby walk away from Palmer's, the principal leaves Brian convinced that he is on the right track in his search for the ultimate meaning of life. When Brian meets Digby for the final time in the novel, Brian confesses that, although he is supposed to understand life through "the feeling," he no longer gets "the feeling." Digby says, "'Perhaps . . . you've grown up'" (W, p. 297). Brian remains determined to continue his quest.

Critical consensus maintains that the characters of the subplot cause the direction of Brian's development, but it is Brian's personality, his extended family, and the events of the plot which cause his changes in character and thought. One critic, Warren Tallman, maintains that the major influences on Brian's development are Sean (a member of Brian's extended family), Milt Palmer, the Ben, the Young Ben, and Saint Sammy. Tallman is indignant that Mitchell asks us to believe that such "a hierarchy of odd and withdrawn persons" could "reconcile Brian's consciousness to the 'realities of birth, hunger, satiety, eternity, death.'"[2] Another critic, Robin Mathews, emphasizes the importance of the Young Ben, saying that Brian "learns much from the young boy of the prairie," specifically that "Brian learns about a moral presence in the natural order from the young Ben."[3] And Ken Mitchell claims that all of the characters influence Brian, particularly the Young Ben and Mr. Digby. From the Young Ben, who is "a spiritual guide," Brian discovers the essential quality of the prairie; from Mr. Digby, who is "crucial to Brian's development," he learns rational maturity.[4]

Brian's development, however, is actually the result of his unique personality responding to events--particularly a series of deaths --in the context of a loving family. Consider as an example the conclusion to Part Three where Brian makes his climactic character change and reaches one of the high points of his thinking. What causes Brian to think that nature is forever, man but temporary? Not Mr. Digby. Not the Young Ben. Gerald's death sparks Brian's thought. Even Brian's faulty reasoning reveals this influence. For nature, Brian reasons from the general to the general: nature in general has always existed in some form; therefore it will always exist. But for people, Brian reasons from the specific to the general: his father died, so humanity will not always exist, so people, separate from nature, die with a unique finality. Such is Brian's father's importance to him. What causes Brian to recognize people's aloneness? Not the Ben. Not Saint Sammy. Brian's night alone on the prairie, Gerald's death, and Maggie's isolating grief engender this recognition. What causes Brian's major change in character? Of the multitude of alternatives, why does Brian turn to helping his family? A detailed answer to this question provides a good example of the actual causes of the direction of Brian's growth.

Brian assumes responsibility for his family largely because his father has set a good example. When Gerald dies, Brian thinks: "He was a big man like Uncle Sean, only no mustaches and gentler. He wore gold cuff links. His whiskers gritted. He recited 'Casey at the Bat'. Once he'd helped to bury a baby pigeon on the prairie. . . . He was a fine man" (W, p. 239). The mention of gold cuff links and "Casey at the Bat" reminds us that Brian admired his father so much that when inventing R. W. God as a playmate, Brian made God much like his father, only not so nearly perfect. The mention of the baby pigeon recalls the most important example of Gerald's influence on his son. When young Brian's pet pigeon died, Gerald took Brian's sorrow and bewilderment seriously, he consoled Brian and attempted to explain death to him, and he conducted a prairie funeral for the pet. The funeral ends thus:

> At the edge of the town, they [Gerald and Brian] turned and stood, looking out over the prairie, to its far line where sheet lightning winked up the world's

> dark rim. Here and there, low along the horizon, pygmy farm buildings stood out momentarily--were quickly blotted. The soft and distant explosions of light were accompanied by a sound as of lumber being carelessly dropped.
>
> Father and son began to walk home. (W, p. 60)

Because the brief illumination and quick blotting out of the farm buildings on the prairie is analogous to man's life and death in the eyes of God, this passage presents the cosmic perspective of Gerald's caring for Brian which is similar to the cosmic perspective Brian realizes as he turns to caring for his family. The explosions of light symbolize human life. Explosions represent good. Brian feels "a soft explosion of feeling . . . , one of completion and culmination" in the comic resolution of Part One (W, p. 60). Light also represents good. This is traditional. Also, R. W. God springs from prisoned sunlight, and in the comic resolution of Part One, wind shakes light from the poplar leaves. Farm buildings, one of man's obvious marks on the prairie, and the personification of these buildings as "pygmy," suggest that the explosions of light are human life and that the darkness is death--appropriate in the context of a burial. But death comes carelessly. The explosions of light are "accompanied by a sound as of lumber being carelessly dropped." The personification of someone dropping lumber suggests in this context God. This interpretation is supported by the number of times the novel's principal symbol of God, the wind, is described as careless. As Brian is about to see the dead two-headed calf, "the wind . . . [lifts] carelessly" (W, p. 175). As Brian attempts to recover from the death of his dog and from his stalemate in learning the meaning of life, "the breath of a careless wind" rustles the leaves (W, p. 185). When Brian lies in bed trying to accommodate himself to his father's death, "[t]he fall wind [is] gentle at his screen; carelessly it [stirs] a tissue of sound through the dry leaves of the poplar outside" (W, p. 243). As Grandma O'Connal lies near death wondering "why she had been," "a careless wind now and again [stirs] among the dead leaves . . ." (W, p. 280). In view of such carelessness, Gerald O'Connal takes care of his son, thus providing Brian with the example which causes him, upon his father's death, to assume responsibility for his mother, brother, and grandmother.

While Gerald's influence is primary, Brian's independent thinking leads him in the same direction. Brian wants everything to be "right," yet he discovers that "'God isn't very considerate . . .'" (W, p. 170). A logical conclusion for Brian to reach is that if God shows no consideration, people should. Significantly, Brian's climactic change in character is summarized thus: "And there was in Brian a growing consideration for the other members of the family . . ." (W, p. 251).

Because the characters and events of the subplot do not significantly influence the direction of Brian's growth, the most direct and probably the most effective means of uniting the plot and subplot is not used. But the split between the plot and the subplot does not appear drastic, for the characters of the subplot are frequently superficially related to the plot. The subplot characters figure incidentally in several important events, and they figure prominently in numerous incidental events, thus fostering the false impression that they are an integral and influential part of Brian's life. Consider Mrs. Abercrombie as an example because she is the antagonist of the subplot. Mrs. Abercrombie's relation to Brian's growth is epitomized by her first appearance in the novel. When Brian visits Mr. Hislop to see God, the minister asks his wife where the church keys are, and she says, "'I don't remember exactly where I put them after Mrs. Abercrombie borrowed them for Auxiliary'" (W, p. 22). Her continuing incidental appearances encourage the illusion that Mrs. Abercrombie influences Brian's development. In Part One Mrs. Abercrombie confronts Mr. Hislop about a Christmas hamper for Ramona, she entertains Mr. and Mrs. O'Connal for bridge, and she occupies Mr. Hislop's thoughts when he avoids mowing his lawn, when he receives her letter of protest about the C.G.I.T. service, and when the church elders side with her in the protest. In Part Two Mrs. Abercrombie appears standing beside the magazine rack in O'Connal's drug store, but she is soon involved in the campaign to win new members for the church, and she is backing her daughter's callous treatment of the Wong children. Maggie O'Connal mentions that Gerald fell asleep at the Abercrombies', and Mr. Powelly announces that Mrs. Abercrombie will host the Ladies' Auxiliary chicken dinner. In Part Three Mrs. Abercrombie appears greeting Gerald O'Connal in front of his drug store. In Part Four she appears sitting on the school board, and she prays with Mr. Powelly during the frightening storm before the climax of the subplot when she resigns from the school board. Beside Mrs. Abercrombie's appearance in such events insignificant to Brian's growth, she appears peripherally in some of the important events in Brian's life. After Brian's transcendental experience looking at a dew drop on a spirea leaf, he notices or thinks of Mrs. Abercrombie three times while sitting in church. When Brian and Forbsie are trying to feed Forbsie's multiplying rabbits, it is from Mrs. Abercrombie's garden that they try stealing carrots. Upon Gerald O'Connal's death, Mrs. Abercrombie initiates the sentimentality that he was a fine man, and she later asks her husband how much Gerald's property is worth. Because several characters in the subplot appear, like Mrs. Abercrombie, so frequently in Brian's novel, a reader may readily assume that they are causally related to Brian's growth when they are actually superficially related to his life.

Although the subplot and plot are not integrated directly by having the characters and events of the subplot affect the direction of Brian's growth, the subplot and plot are integrated to a certain extent indirectly--in this case, thematically. The theme of the subplot is that intolerance is evil, or, more specifically, that intolerance backed by hypocrisy and revenge is a dangerous force which people should oppose. The theme of Brian's character development is that since nature--or God--does not actively take care of people, then people should. The themes are not closely related, for intolerance and hypocrisy are not issues for Brian, and revenge was a concern only of his early childhood. The themes, however, are generally related in their concern for consideration and responsibility.

The theme and the minor themes of the subplot work to unite the subplot with the plot because they create for the reader--although not for Brian--a context for Brian's growth. To take one example, Mr. Hislop's defeat by futility and Miss Thompson's victory over futility provide the reader with a context for Brian's confrontation with despair. Mr. Hislop feels "a wave of futility" when he considers his petty-minded parishioners, and he resigns (W, p. 49). Miss Thompson experiences a similar sense of "futility" when she considers persuading the mothers of her students to assist the Wongs, but she continues trying to help the unfortunate family nonetheless (W, p. 159). Brian faces futility often. After he sees the two-headed calf, for example, the more Brian thinks, "the more the futility [wells] up in him, urging him to forget the whole matter" of why the calf was born only to die (W, p. 177). Upon Jappy's death, Brian is overwhelmed by futility, and he must struggle in an effort to fill the resulting emptiness. Although Brian does not have the examples of Mr. Hislop and Miss Thompson before him, the reader does. Thus the subplot puts Brian's growth in context for the reader.

The context provided for Brian's growth has a two-fold effect. It keeps the reader sympathetic to Brian. No matter what Brian's shortcomings, in the context of such men of religion as Mr. Hislop, Mr. Powelly, and Saint Sammy, Brian's tenacious, unhypocritical, level-headed quest is impressive. In the context created by farmers such as Saint Sammy, Sean, and Bent Candy, Brian's decision to be a successful, educated, and socially responsible agriculturalist appears the best possible decision. While the context provided by the subplot amplifies Brian's success and keeps the reader sympathetic to Brian, it also creates a tension between Brian's admirable character development to the age of twelve and the possibility of a much less impressive performance when, in the future, Brian confronts the likes of Mrs. Abercrombie. Brian's growth has been excellent, but he has not had to face intolerance disguised by hypocrisy and fueled by vengeance. Developing this tension in the novel seems an effective and rather sophisticated means of unifying the plot and the subplot--particularly effective and fitting because it complements on a social level the perspective in which Brian is repeatedly placed on a philosophical level. Developing this tension between Brian's commendable growth and the perils that he has yet to face also seems an efficacious means of maintaining adult interest in the story of a fairly ordinary child. The comic resolution of the subplot, however, destroys any ironic tension that has been created. When Mrs. Abercrombie is defeated, when the Young Ben runs free, when Miss Thompson and Mr. Digby receive votes of confidence from the school board, when, in short, the forces of "'sweetness and light'" reign, no evil exists to pose a threat to Brian's impressive but largely untested maturity (W, p. 287).

The comic resolution to the subplot also destroys the balance of comedy and tragedy appropriate to Brian's quest. So strong is the comic resolution to the subplot that the critic Robin Mathews calls Who Has Seen the Wind a comedy:

> The novel is a comedy. It closes with the forces of light routing the forces of darkness. Mrs Abercrombie resigns from the school board. Digby and Miss Thompson are about to marry. Brian's future is apparently assured as a dirt doctor. The young Ben is saved from "an institute [sic] of correction."[5]

But the novel does not close with the forces of light routing the forces of darkness, the subplot does. And Brian's decision to be a dirt doctor is only a small part of his development. Mathews, in his principal analysis of Brian's growth, not only acknowledges but emphasizes the tragedy in Brian's development:

> Brian must be satisfied to acquiesce in failure, but failure that has taken him part way and which describes his desire for virtue and the good. . . . Brian has learned the "acceptance or acquiescence" that [Frederick Philip] Grove believes is a quality of tragic greatness.[6]

While it is questionable whether Brian has acquiesced, it is certain that Brian has, in several senses, failed. The comic resolution to the subplot obscures Brian's failures and destroys the appropriate balance of comedy and tragedy created in the plot.

The most serious problem with the resolution of the subplot, however, is not that it is comic but that it is sentimental. The crucial weakness in the relation between the plot and the subplot is that the sentimental nature of the subplot's resolution contradicts what Brian learns in the plot. Mrs. Abercrombie and Mr. Powelly carefully orchestrate their campaign to cage the Young Ben, and Mrs. Abercrombie puts Mr. Digby in a position where he must either send the Young Ben to "an institution of correction" or else sacrifice his job, when suddenly the Young Ben is allowed to go free, Mrs. Abercrombie resigns from the board, and the board favours a vote of confidence for Mr. Digby and Miss Thompson (_W_, p. 284). This is a miraculous turn of events. There is slight motivation: Miss Thompson attacks the board members in a revealing harangue, and the board members are dissatisfied with Mrs. Abercrombie because she is rather domineering--specifically, she had the spittoons removed from the board room. The climax of the subplot is wish fulfilment. But in the plot Brian learns exactly the opposite: things are not always "right." Brian learns that nature is beautiful but also deadly; that love may be the answer but that it is always love of the imperfect. Brian learns lessons of realistic compromise, but the climax of the subplot offers unrealistic, unbridled victory.

In conclusion, unifying the plot and subplot is the one basic and crucial compositional demand not met effectively. The subplot is not joined directly with the plot because the subplot characters do not influence the direction of Brian's growth. Rather the subplot is joined to a certain extent indirectly with the plot by providing a context for Brian's growth. The thematic connection here is general rather than specific, and the possibility of developing the nascent tension between

Brian's commendable growth and the existent, more dangerous problems he has yet to encounter is lost with the comic resolution of the subplot. The comic and sentimental resolution to the subplot is inappropriate in both kind and manner, for the comedy upsets the balance of tragedy and comedy created in the plot and the sentimentality contradicts what Brian learns in the plot. In contrast, the considerable compositional demands of the plot are met successfully. Our attachment to Brian is deftly secured early in the novel, and it is maintained throughout. Brian's development in character and thought is clear yet complex. His growth contains, and concludes with, an appropriate and effective mixture of comedy and tragedy. So strong is the plot and so effective is the communication by structure and symbol above and beyond Brian that the story of Brian's unexceptional childhood interests us. Nonetheless, a novel of only Brian's development could easily be unduly confined. Thus we welcome the subplot even if it leaves the novel disunified, and even if it leaves the successful solution of the compositional problems of the plot to create enough power to make Who Has Seen the Wind Mitchell's most successful novel.

CHAPTER III

The essential story which W. O. Mitchell tells in The Kite is that of the development of David Lang, a jaded, harried, television personality and journalist who, on assignment to write an article about the oldest man in the world, journeys from Toronto to Shelby, Alberta, where hearing about and talking with the energetic 111-year-old Daddy Sherry helps David realize that he should live his life with the enthusiasm and determination appropriate to his renewed awareness of his mortality. At the beginning of the novel, David has a short-range view of time. He sees time in terms of the next deadline. Consequently, fleeting activities fill his life, and he accomplishes nothing substantial. The root of the problem is in his childhood. David was unable to grow naturally. With his father dead and his mother rather cold and intimidating, young David took refuge in solitary intellectual pursuits, not his natural inclination. David's change is presented symbolically. David longed to fly a kite, but, when his substitute father, Lon, died, David turned to reading encyclopedias. Flying a kite symbolizes living--both physical existence and living life to the fullest. It symbolizes physical existence in that the thin string connecting person and kite is like a person's connection with life, easily broken. Furthermore, a person's hold on a flying kite is like a person's hold on life, easily released. A flying kite also represents living life to the fullest, that is, recognizing one's slight and brief hold on life, and consequently living with enthusiasm, living with the vibrance of a dancing kite. When young David began reading encyclopedias rather than flying kites, he began the misguided growth which left him, at the opening of the novel, existing more than living.

David begins to change whe[illegible] undertakes the assignment on Daddy Sherry. In the course of his research, David meets many townspeople who tell him stories about Daddy Sherry and who volunteer opinions as to Daddy's "'secret'" of life.[1] Daddy himself completely wins over David, who is unable to understand the old man as a person or as the subject of a magazine article. While David is learning about and from Daddy Sherry, he boards at Mrs. Clifford's where he becomes increasingly attached to Mrs. Clifford's widowed daughter, Helen, and Helen's son, Keith. David helps Keith make a kite for Daddy Sherry's birthday, and flying the kite reminds David of the kite of his youth. This recollection is the catalyst which brings David to understand Daddy Sherry and how he, David, should live his life. At the end of The Kite, David has a long-range view of time. He realizes that the important deadline is his inevitable death, and that, consequently, he must "never settle for anything less" than living his life fully (K, p. 210).

David is clearly the protagonist. He undergoes the major changes in the novel. His principal change is one of thought, as he develops a new conception of time and realizes the implications of this for the way he lives his life. But David's character also changes. David grows less hurried, more relaxed; less self-contained, more sociable and family-oriented; less superficial and jaded, more sincere and enthusiastic. In addition, David's fortune, it is implied, is about to change as he marries Helen and begins a new kind of life. The principal agent of David's change, Daddy Sherry, does not change.

Although Daddy decides to die and then reverses his decision, he is the same in character, thought, and fortune at the end of the novel as he was at the first.

There is more to suggest that David is the protagonist. He spans the novel. His paramount position is established early. The first word, "He . . . ," refers to David, and the first two chapters are devoted to him. David is further established as the protagonist because the pattern of his actions follows the pattern of many protagonists, the quest. The quest is reinforced by another standard pattern which David describes as the "'[r]eturn to the scene of [his] boyhood'" (K, p. 3). Another indication of David's centrality is that the key symbol, which is also the title of the novel, is David's symbol. Finally, as is appropriate for his role as protagonist, David supplies the comic conclusion to The Kite by discovering Daddy Sherry's "secret" and by planning to marry Helen.

The form of the plot is distinctly comic. In the broadest sense of comic, the ending is a happy one. David simultaneously discovers the secret to Daddy Sherry as the subject of a magazine article or novel, solves the riddle of Daddy Sherry as a person, and realizes what it is that Daddy Sherry has for him--the understanding that he must always live "with the awareness of his own mortality" and, consequently, "never settle for anything less" than living his life to the fullest (K, p. 209, p. 210). The comic nature of the resolution is enhanced because David not only discovers a way to live a better life but, as the symbol of the kite and the story of David's childhood suggest, he discovers the key to living rather than merely existing. David's change allows him to recognize and join the society to which he naturally belongs. Thus in another sense the plot is comic because it ends with the scene of community and marriage traditional in comedies. David's imminent marriage to Helen is strongly implied, most obviously in David's thought, "'Out of limbo . . . for both of us'" (K, p. 210). The word "limbo" was defined earlier by David and Helen as "extra" or single (K, pp. 150-151). The sense of community is strong because with David's implied marriage, he joins Helen and Keith in Daddy Sherry's line or family. Appropriately, the four end the novel celebrating Daddy's birthday by kite flying--that is, living life to the fullest.

If the form of the plot is to be developed successfully, at least four compositional demands must be met. First, David, the protagonist, must not be overshadowed by Daddy Sherry, the agent of his change. There is a danger that Daddy may eclipse David because David is flawed while Daddy possesses the qualities which David lacks, and because Daddy Sherry's birthday celebration is the salient event of the novel. Second, David must inspire in the reader concern for his growth. If the reader does not hope that David finds that for which he is looking, and if the reader does not rejoice when David finds it, then The Kite has little suspense or gripping force and scant power in its comic resolution. Third, Helen should be admirable. If David's implied marriage to Helen is to have any more power than the reflex reaction that a marriage at the end of a novel is good, the reader must feel that Helen is particularly good for David. Fourth, the answer which David discovers must be acceptable and important. If the answer is unacceptable or trivial, the climax of the novel will be objectionable or annoying rather than successfully comic. The artistic achievement of The Kite depends in large part on meeting these compositional demands.

The first compositional demand--that David, the protagonist, remain at the forefront of the novel--is not met. The quest by David which the opening chapters promise is developed little and is overshadowed as a structuring principle by the theories about Daddy Sherry's "secret," by the stories of Daddy's exploits, and by the subplots of Daddy's threatened death and Daddy's birthday celebration. Not surprisingly, Daddy Sherry replaces David as the principal focus of interest.

The early chapters of The Kite promise a quest, ostensibly for a magazine article but, as David slowly realizes, actually for something more important. The first chapter establishes the problem to be solved: David has become jaded, harried, and dissatisfied with the fleeting nature of his work. David's discontent with ephemeral newspaper columns and television shows epitomizes his quiet desperation at his superficial and misdirected life. Chapter I also suggests the solution: David should write an article on Daddy Sherry of Shelby, Alberta. This solution makes sense only because Daddy Sherry has the enthusiasm for life which David lacks, and because Shelby is the area of David's youth. Thus David has the opportunity to set right the misdirection begun in his childhood and to begin living his life to the fullest. The second chapter of The Kite flashes back to David's childhood to establish in some detail the root cause of David's problem. Thus the first two chapters establish the expectation that the novel will be the drama of how David's return to his roots alters his character, and, primarily, how his quest for a magazine article becomes his quest for the important knowledge he lacks. The novel's working power or gripping force will be David's development--the intellectual analyses, the emotional upheaval, the elation of success, the despair of failure, the suspense of an uncertain resolution. More specifically, the novel's power promises to come primarily from David's reacting to and analyzing the stories about Daddy, the explanations of Daddy's "secret," and the events of the narrative.

David's reactions and analyses, however, are almost non-existent. David cannot react during the telling of the stories about Daddy Sherry because of the shift in the narrative point of view. Most of The Kite is written in what is traditionally called the limited or selective omniscient point of view. The reader sees things from David's vantage point, and the reader has direct and complete access to David's mind only. For the five flashbacks about Daddy's exploits, however, the narrative point of view changes to the omniscient. Thus the characters are prevented from telling their stories, and David is prevented from reacting during the telling. David may react after each of the five stories is told, but his responses are almost non-existent: the trapeze episode, no reaction; the oil in Paradise Valley story, no reaction; the flood of '54 tale, no reaction. After the Reverend Donald Finlay tells David of how he employed unscrupulous tactics to persuade Daddy from marriage, there is this reaction: "David could imagine how a priest must feel after hearing a confession; nor had the priest any more reason to worry than a penitent would that his confidence would be violated" (K, p. 156). This is irrelevant to David's development. David's reaction to the goose hunting story is to type furiously until 4:30 in the morning. This does not reveal the important thing--what he typed.

Similarly, David's reaction to the explanations of Daddy's "secret" is practically non-existent. Explanations from Mr. Spicer, Dr. Richardson, Mr. Suttee, Donald Finlay, and Daddy himself elicit no evaluation from David. When Helen opines that Daddy's capacity for surprise is his secret to living, David says, "'That's another one for my collection . . .'" (K, p. 136). If David is to hold the reader's interest, he should be reacting to these explanations, not merely collecting them.

Although David does not react to the stories of Daddy's exploits or to the guesses at Daddy's "secret," he does react to some of the events in the narrative present. While attending the organizational meeting for the Daddy Sherry Anniversary Celebration, David thinks that the townspeople endow Daddy Sherry with the "magic of a tribal shaman," and David feels that he is witnessing a "ritual," an "obeisance to the eternal ancestors of a mythological past when man was ageless" (K, p. 36, p. 37). This is David's only major response in the first half of the novel to the phenomenon of Daddy Sherry. At the mid-point of the novel, David reacts strongly after his second meeting with Daddy Sherry. David feels like crying because "longevity [has] ordained Daddy with apostolic succession, but it [has] bequeathed him such a wistful fragment of historic truth to hand on" (K, p. 105). Later, David realizes that "he had expected more than he should have from the old man, who had been too immersed in living to build historical significance out of his days" (K, p. 124). David's reaction and analysis work well here, for his sadness is a revealing mixture of disappointment at Daddy's dearth of marketable anecdotes, and of condescending pity at Daddy's unexamined life. David's analysis is a convincing mixture of newly discovered truth (Daddy was too busy living to translate his life into conventional history) and of persisting illusion (it is not that David expected too much of Daddy but that he expected the wrong thing). When Daddy announces his intention to die, David finally acknowledges, but does not identify, Daddy's importance to him: "[T]he cross-willed old human had completely won him, and somehow--if Daddy were to die now--their relationship would have failed to complete itself" (K, p. 135). David's penultimate reaction of any note is one of "discouragement" and confusion (K, p. 195). He is "not thinking clearly and effectively," so he thinks such obtuse things as this: "In some terrible way the kite was part of it [his discouragement], but whether it was this kite, or whether it was another kite not quite dissolved by the years between boyhood and now, he could not be sure" (K, p. 194, p. 195). David doubts that the riddle of Daddy Sherry is the primary cause of his turmoil, and only after talking with Helen does he realize that Helen is the principal factor. Such obtuse thinking and slight emotional analysis is not of itself interesting, but it does inform the reader of David's state. Finally, David pieces together the factors of Daddy Sherry, Helen, and the kite to produce the climax of the novel. Thus, although David's analysis of events in the narrative present is generally slight, it is more prevalent and more substantial than his nearly non-existent reactions to the flashbacks of Daddy's adventures and the various versions of Daddy's "secret."

Because David's mental and emotional search is largely undisclosed, his quest is overshadowed as a structuring principle by the versions of Daddy's "secret," by the flashbacks to Daddy's adventures, and by the episodes of Daddy's threatened death and misguided birthday celebration. The "secret" is important. It is the first thing Daddy mentions: "'Puhtatuhs an' Irish twist . . . . buttermilk an' pigweed greens--keep reg'lar--stay outa draughts. . . . The secret'" (K, p. 32). The explanations of Daddy's "secret" change from those emphasizing the physical and long life to those emphasizing the philosophical and the good life. Environment, says Mr. Spicer, is the secret: "'[D]ry--pure air for ninety years--kind of preserved him'" (K, p. 28). Daddy vows that the keys to longevity are eating properly and keeping out of draughts. But Dr. Richardson attributes Daddy's longevity to "an unusually strong . . . energy charge" and a "lucky environment" (K, p. 64). Daddy has lived so long "'because he just doesn't give a damn for unimportant things,'" says Mr. Suttee. "'Things like half a million dollars'" (K, p. 123). Mr. Suttee suggests that an attitude rather than something physical is responsible for Daddy's long life. The transition from explanations emphasizing longevity and the physical to explanations stressing quality of life and attitudinal attributes is made explicit in Helen's analysis: "'Surprise--that's his secret. . . . I think it's the most remarkable thing about him, . . . not that he's lived so long but that he's kept his appetite for surprise'" (K, pp. 135-136). Helen does not mean that Daddy likes to be surprised but that, "'like a poet,'" he regards many commonplace things as unique, fresh, and thus somewhat surprising (K, p. 136). The Reverend Donald Finlay similarly bypasses how long Daddy has lived and speaks of how Daddy has lived, "'fully--intuitively'" (K, p. 152). He also discusses the moral qualities of Daddy and his generation--honour, loyalty, pride, and honesty. In Daddy's concluding statement of his "secret," he reiterates that the keys to longevity are eating properly and avoiding drafts, but he includes a pronouncement of the best philosophy of life: "'Live loose an' soople an' you'll come through without a scratch. Live careful an' you'll break your goddam neck'" (K, p. 191). David's climactic discovery of his own explanation of Daddy Sherry is, appropriately, the broadest: Daddy has "lived always with the awareness of his own mortality" so that he insists on living his life fully (K, p. 209). The series of what David calls

Sherry explanations attracts the reader's attention not only because it promises the answer to Daddy Sherry but because the series is dynamic, developing from answers emphasizing longevity and physical factors to answers concerning a philosophy of life.

The flashbacks to Daddy Sherry's exploits also shift the focus of interest from David. In the only published article exclusively on The Kite, Catherine McLay's most extended examination of any weakness in the novel, and her most thought-provoking comments, concern the flashbacks, so I will approach them through her analysis.

> Interwoven into these events [of David's quest] are a series of flashbacks, the first to David's youth and the importance of his loss of the kite, and the remainder to incidents in Daddy's past which reveal his character: the visit to Mrs. Clifford (1956), the goose hunt (1949), the discovery of oil at Paradise (1955), the foiled marriage to his housekeeper (1947), the tale of Joe Binestettner and his daughter Victoria, and the flood of 1954. The real weakness of this structure is not that anecdotes predominate over present action, but that the first three anecdotes are vital to the novel, while the remaining four suggest a falling rather than a rising action. . . . [T]he final anecdotes become marginal, amusing in themselves but not advancing David's movement toward knowledge.[2]

The first point to be cleared out of the way is that the Binestettner story is not a flashback. The narrative does not change to the omniscient point of view; it remains in the selective omniscient point of view just as it does in Daddy's other reminiscences. With this correction, McLay's main point is that the last three flashbacks are marginal and thus they create "a falling rather than a rising action." Although the flashback to Daddy's foiled marriage does create a problem, neither the oil in Paradise Valley story nor the flood of '54 tale are less important than the earlier flashbacks. Because the story of Daddy's near marriage is marginal to both David and Daddy, one might argue that it is a severe letdown in the series of flashbacks. However, there are signals that this flashback is different from the others. It is the only flashback not awarded a separate chapter. It is only three pages in length while the others are ten, eighteen, seventeen, twelve, and ten pages respectively. The flashback to Daddy's failed marriage is obviously minor. Its length announces that the flashback does not attempt to perform functions of the magnitude that the other flashbacks do. Thus, considerable justification exists for reading the story of Daddy's foiled marriage as a special case and not expecting it to aid in creating a rising action in the series of flashbacks. There is no general suggestion of "a falling rather than a rising action" in the series of flashbacks because neither the oil in Paradise Valley story nor the flood of '54 tale is "marginal" as McLay maintains. Daddy's decision to prohibit drilling in Paradise Valley reveals his capacity for intense loyalty, and it dramatizes his disinterest in material things. While the trapeze flashback reveals Daddy's stubborn, daredevil approach to life, and the goose hunt portrays Daddy's contempt for death, it remains for the flashback about oil in Paradise Valley to display Daddy's moral side, a concern which thereafter surfaces most notably in Donald Finlay's discussion of pioneer virtues and in Helen's final explanation of Daddy. Daddy Sherry's moral qualities are germane to David's growth. Although the flood of '54 does not "[advance] David's movement towards knowledge," it performs another valuable function: it enacts the essence of Daddy Sherry. While Daddy's stubborn enthusiasm surprises in the flashbacks Mrs. Clifford, Helen, Keith, Harry Richardson, Donald Finlay, Ollie Pringle, Mr. Suttee, and Title Jack Dalgliesh, it remains for the flood of '54 flashback to affect the reader as Daddy affects the characters. The tale does so with an ending perfectly in keeping with Daddy's character yet still a surprise--which is the way in which Daddy affects the novel's characters. This episode also provides a high point of the humour in the novel. Thus the flashbacks do not create a sense of falling action. But neither is there a sense of rising action. Each major flashback provides an equally important function. However, the flashbacks shift the focus of interest from David because their action is generally more exciting than the plot and because Daddy Sherry features in four major flashbacks while David features in only one.

A shift in focus from David is also prompted by events in the narrative present involving Daddy Sherry. Chapters 10, 11, and 12 feature Daddy's threat to die. Suspense increases as it becomes evident that Daddy is successfully willing himself to die and that no solution is at hand. After David and Keith persuade Daddy that he should live because it is inappropriate for him to die in the spring, Daddy remains prominent because of the Daddy Sherry Birthday Celebration. While this celebration is an element of the novel from the time Mr. Spicer promotes it in the third chapter, it becomes more interesting in the final two chapters when a tension is created between the decision to give Daddy a surprise present of a grandfather clock and the knowledge that Daddy will be happy only with a present that he wants, not a surprise, and probably not a clock.

The growing romance between David and Helen, and David's increasing struggle to solve the puzzle of Daddy Sherry, counter somewhat the shift in interest to Daddy. The romance between David and Helen, however, is rather uninteresting because it is staged and suffers no serious impediments. David's struggle to make Daddy "come out" to a pat answer is only slightly engaging because the struggle is scarcely shown and because David's concern should be neither for fitting Daddy into an article nor for simplifying him so that he is easily understandable, but for examining the implications Daddy has for his way of life (K, p. 198).

David remains nominally the protagonist, but Daddy becomes the focus of interest. After the early chapters establish The Kite as the story of David's quest, David's mental and emotional responses to the stories about Daddy Sherry, to the hypotheses about Daddy's "secret," and to events in the narrative present are hardly shown. David remains nominally the protagonist, for his difficulty fitting Daddy Sherry into an article and into his understanding of life is repeatedly mentioned though seldom detailed. The skeleton of a quest is insufficient to maintain interest. The shift in focus is not only away from David, but to only one other character, Daddy Sherry. Four of the five major flashbacks star Daddy, the series of hypotheses concern Daddy's "secret," and the most interesting events in the narrative present feature Daddy. Thus Daddy, who should remain the agent of David's change, becomes the focus of our attention.

The second compositional demand--that David inspire reader concern for his growth--is not successfully met. Initially, David is a stereotype of the middle-aged executive, jaded, rushed, and somewhat dissatisfied. David is also initially rather objectionable. The first thing revealed about him is that he is afraid of flying, primarily the take-offs and landings. Then that he is obsessed with time, that he is always on the run. Then that he lacks curiosity and enthusiasm. Then that he is cynical and jaded. David, it seems, has only two redeeming features: he is dissatisfied with himself, and he decides, despite much hesitation, to accept the magazine assignment on Daddy Sherry. Following such an introduction, the flashback to David's childhood fosters sympathy for David by explaining why he is in such a sorry state. Warming to David is difficult, however, because he is obtuse--at least more so than the reader. For example, the crucial first meeting with Daddy Sherry leaves David ranting about Daddy's senility and denouncing Earl Whitton for convincing him to take the Daddy Sherry assignment, but the reader knows that Daddy is not senile and that David should be thankful for the assignment. Similarly, while David persists in trying to fit Daddy into an article, the reader realizes that David should be trying to fit Daddy into his life. David's slight characterization further discourages concern for him. Major decisions reveal character, yet possibly David's most crucial decision, to stay in Shelby, is reported incidentally from a telephone conversation, allowing no substantial insight into David's thoughts and feelings. Small touches such as habits and mannerisms help bring a character to life, but, while Daddy Sherry has numerous habits such as smoking Senate House cigars and drinking whiskey from a shot glass, and while he has several speech mannerisms such as his multipurpose "aaah," David has none. Concern is difficult to develop for a poorly realized, somewhat objectionable stereotype.

The third compositional demand--that Helen appear admirable--is not successfully met. Helen is more a function than a character. Her function is to provide David with a prospective wife and family at the conclusion of the novel. In fulfilling this function in a limited time and space she becomes unbelievable and unlikeable. The three extended conversations between Helen and David are the principal avenues for revealing Helen's character. Helen ends the first conversation she ever has with David thus: "'It's nice to have a man around the house again. . . . The house is different for having a man in it. Crisper--and at night the darkness isn't so--so dark. . . . All the machines in a house work better with a man around'" (K, p. 129). Helen is excessively forward in such a way as to be neither credible nor likeable. Two days later she opens the second conversation with "'I don't go out much'" (K, p. 148). She explains that she is "'not whole without a man,'" and that she "'was born with candles inside [her] that light up just for men'" but that the men around Shelby have offered her only sex. Helen is neither so personal nor so objectionable when, in her third conversation with David, she offers a substantial analysis of Daddy Sherry, but the conversation ends in sentimentality:

> "I'd . . . [like to] thank you for . . . helping my son to make a kite for Daddy."
>
> "That was for myself as much as Keith," David said. . . . "I almost flew a kite once when I was a boy." . . .
>
> "Good night, David." Still she faced him. "You'll fly it some time--I know you will."
>
> The next thing he knew she was in his arms and they were holding each other--desperately. (K, p. 201)

Although Helen's characterization is irreparably harmed by such scenes, Helen occasionally escapes from her functional role and its unfortunate behavior. For example, she seems to know how to handle Daddy Sherry better than anyone else does. She knows when to be firm. When Daddy is expansive about his victory over Mrs. Clifford, Helen stops him from reclaiming his shotgun. When Daddy starts mumbling riddles about his tropical trip, Helen stops him short: "'Wait a minute--my time's valuable--can't waste it if you're not going to make some sense'" (K, p. 173). Helen also knows when to humour Daddy. Knowing that

Daddy's determination increases with resistance, Helen helps Daddy purchase tickets for his cruise. She knows that Daddy will not be able to use the tickets. In the ensuing confrontation with her mother, Helen is the charming victor. She says that if Belva's reading adventure stories to Daddy of diving for pearls in tropical lagoons caused his enthusiasm for a tropical holiday, then Belva had "'better go easy on Astonishing Scientific Stories'" (K, p. 176). Not only does Helen treat the episode with the requisite humour, but she stops her meddling mother with a line which one feels W. O. Mitchell endorses: "'I've never seen the time, Mother, that people didn't interfere without justifying it as being for someone else's own good'" (K, p. 176). Scenes such as these enhance Helen's credibility and make her more sympathetic, but she is principally a function. Because the novel needs a marriage and David does not have much time, Helen is too forward, too personal, too romantic.

The poor characterization of David and Helen enervates the comic climax. David and Helen do not generate much reader concern for their welfare. Some concern for David probably results because he is identifiable as the protagonist. His marriage to Helen, however, is not an especially happy affair, for Helen fails to demonstrate that she is particularly good for David. Furthermore, their relationship is too easy to be believable or highly valued. The comic resolution is also weakened because there is no impediment to David and Helen's marriage, so there is no suspense or disappointment to make the successful betrothal sweeter. Thus the comic resolution relies heavily on a stock reaction to a traditional comic marriage rather than relying on artistic virtuosity.

The fourth compositional demand--that the knowledge which David discovers be acceptable and important--is also not successfully met. Just as poor characterization enervates the comic resolution, so does the climactic pronouncement that, in light of one's mortality, one should never settle for less than living life to the fullest. While this message is appropriate for David because he had lost sight of his mortality and because he envisages living life to the fullest in terms of meaningful work (a novel) and social commitment (Helen and Keith), the message is generally neither impressive nor acceptable. It is commonplace and amoral. The message is amoral because never settling for less specifies only determination and not goals or means. The notion of living for today because tomorrow you may die is common. Just how tired and worn it is becomes evident when David states it baldly. Tied to the never-settle-for-less message is the idea of living life like an acrobat. This idea is emphasized in Daddy's final explanation of his secret because his final explanation duplicates his earlier ones except for this idea: "'Don't give a whoop--be a dangerous acerobat. . . . Live loose an' soople an' you'll come through without a scratch'" (K, p. 191). The connection between living fully and living like an acrobat is reinforced because the symbol of living, the kite, is associated with acrobatics. When Lon makes young David a kite, he points out that the tail must be precisely the right length if the kite is to "'dive an' dash an' do acrobatics'" (K, p. 11). When Daddy Sherry flies his kite, he says, "'[W]e got to take at least a foot off of that tail--then she'll be strong an' she'll be steady an' she'll be acerobatic too'" (K, p. 209). However, living life like an acrobat, dangerous and supple, is still an amoral recommendation, for it prescribes the style but not the content.

The moral element of the message is provided largely by the Reverend Donald Finlay and by Helen. Donald Finlay explains to David that "'living fully'" means "'taking advantage of every bit of elasticity life offers and stretching it to your profit'" (K, p. 152). By profit he means freedom, and the freedom must not be used selfishly or licentiously, for "'that's the most restricted life of all--to be slave of appetites--it invites the worst kind of restraint--that of others--of society'" (K, p. 152). According to Donald Finlay, Daddy developed a code of honour, loyalty, pride, and honesty, and these virtues seem to have flourished in pioneer western Canada. Donald Finlay argues that honesty flourished because, with few people and long distances between people, the early westerners could not afford the danger of dishonesty. Donald Finlay concludes his argument by saying that, despite the increased dishonesty today, people are "'more capable of honesty'" because he has "'faith'" that humanity has improved since Daddy's youth (K, p. 154). Even if one grants Donald Finlay his blind faith in humanity's inevitable perfectibility, more dishonesty is more dishonesty. If there is increased dishonesty, and if people are increasingly capable of honesty, then there is more dishonesty today because people face such massive temptations to dishonesty that, in spite of their increased capability to be honest, they are actually more dishonest than people were in Daddy's youth. The situation is presumably as serious for the other pioneer virtues. Thus, for Daddy Sherry to be "taking advantage of every bit of elasticity that life offers" in the context of pioneer honour, loyalty, pride, and honesty is splendid; but for anyone to be advising people to do so without the context of the pioneer virtues--even with the warning that the people not be selfish or licentious--is dangerous.

Helen's discussion with David about the differences between the time of Daddy's youth and today is more obviously depressing. Helen argues that Daddy's time "'didn't encourage conformity--it gave him a chance to resist imprint,'" but that there is "'no choice any more--we all travel together . . .'" into the heart of darkness encompassing the world (K, p. 199, p. 200). While Daddy "'made his own hits--runs--errors,'" modern people can only be spectators of their doom. David summarizes the bleakness of the outlook nicely: "'That was very nice for him . . . and awful for us'" (K, p. 201). Thus the answer which is an essential element of the comic resolution is not only commonplace, not only amoral, but rather depressing.

The Kite fails as David's story, and it fails as a didactic piece. David, the protagonist, is eclipsed by Daddy Sherry, the agent of his change. David's unengaging character and his lack of analysis allow our attention to shift, and Daddy Sherry's past and present exploits plus the series of hypotheses about his "secret" shift our interest to Daddy. The mere outline of a quest is insufficient to generate power in the comic conclusion. Nor do David and Helen's characters give force to the resolution. The force of the climax also depends upon the didactic pronouncement, and, although the dynamic series of hypotheses about Daddy's "secret" generates interest, David's concluding version of the "secret" is disappointing. The impressive parts of The Kite are Daddy Sherry and his stories. The trapeze episode and the flood of '54 are masterfully told tales. And Daddy Sherry is an intriguing character, part mythological creature, part stereotypical cranky old man, and part convincing human being--particularly convincing in the complexity of his bad days and in the ingenuity of his selfish manipulation of people. But these artistic achievements are not central to this study. This investigation asks whether The Kite succeeds as an artistic whole, and finds that it fails.

CHAPTER IV

The essential story which W. O. Mitchell tells in The Vanishing Point is that of Carlyle Sinclair's search for Victoria Rider, a quest which becomes, more significantly, Carlyle's search for himself. Carlyle's culture, as represented by Aunt Pearl, Old Kacky, and Mr. Sinclair, socialized him in such a way that by the time he was a middle-aged man teaching on the Paradise Valley reserve, he almost deserved his friend Sanders' description as "'a Puritan bastard.'"[1] Carlyle had lost touch with what might be called his natural self and with the right way to treat people. Talking with Sanders, dealing with Archie Nicotine, tackling the problems on the reserve, and escaping for nine years the immediate pressure of his culture, Carlyle changes enough so that his usual defenses are relaxed, and the "loss of Victoria" in the city "[shatters] something inside him." He knows "that he must put back together something he [has] been trying all his life to keep from being splintered--broken beyond repair" (VP, p. 323). The hypnotic Prairie Chicken Dance helps Carlyle overcome his background and reach beyond himself to another person. It also helps him "lash the hidden instinct wolf to life," that is, accept and integrate his connection with "the living whole" (VP, p. 384, p. 3). The example of the Reverend Heally Richards helps Carlyle recognize that he has been treating the Indians wrongly, "ordering them into a moral box to suit himself only--not them" (VP, p. 354). Carlyle integrates his acceptance of the physical with his recognition that he is responsible for loving, not ordering, his fellow man. He sleeps with Victoria and plans to marry her.

The conclusion is comic. Carlyle's search for Victoria and his search for himself are both successful. The conclusion is also comic in the more specifically literary sense that Carlyle joins, as much as possible, the society to which he properly belongs: the Stony society.[2] He joins the band in the Rabbit Dance and the Owl Dance, and he sleeps with Victoria. He becomes "personally involved" (VP, p. 388). A marriage is promised. Furthermore, symbols declare Carlyle's transformation to be of the magnitude of the change from the dead of winter to the life of spring. Carlyle's success is parallelled by the Stonies'. Throughout, the Stonies have assumed increased responsibility for their welfare, and they have progressed in education, nutrition, agriculture, and housing. Archie's getting his truck running symbolizes the progress. The novel concludes with a declaration of independence: "'Won't have to impose on you for a ride any more--Sinclair'" (VP, p. 393). Triumphs abound.

The form of the plot suggests at least three basic and crucial compositional demands. First, if the comedy is to have power, Carlyle must be characterized in such a way that he inspires reader concern for his welfare. This is a problem because Carlyle must be flawed so that he may improve, yet he must be sympathetic so that the reader cares about his progress. Second, Victoria must be characterized in such a way that she creates reader concern for her well-being, and in such a way that she is sufficiently complex to seem capable of building the all-important "bridge" between Carlyle and herself at the climax of the novel (VP, p. 385). The principal overt action in The Vanishing Point is Carlyle's search for Victoria, and, if the reader does not care about Victoria, the search will lose much of its power. The climax depends upon Carlyle and Victoria "building a bridge" to one another, and, if Victoria is not complex enough to perform convincingly what the theme insists is a uniquely human task, the climax will fail to generate the maximum impact.[3] The strong didactic element in the novel suggests a third compositional demand: the theme should be acceptable and convincing. The didactic component is acceptable when we can believe in it outside the context of the novel. It is convincing when the actions, characters, and thoughts in the novel embody the theme and express it in a possible and plausible manner. The importance of the didactic component is indicated by W. O. Mitchell's statement that he abandoned work on The Alien, which "said No" to life, and replaced it with The Vanishing Point, which is intended to say Yes to life.[4] It behooves us to ask whether the Yes is acceptable and convincing. If it is, the comic resolution will be supported and enhanced by reassuring wisdom. If the Yes is not credible, it will foster queries, doubts, and criticism inimicable to the comic conclusion.

The first artistic task is to create Carlyle in such a way that he generates reader concern for his well-being even though he is seriously flawed. While numerous techniques work to produce a sympathetic response to Carlyle, other facets of the characterization nullify this. The structure of the novel is instrumental in generating initial reader concern for Carlyle, for it introduces Carlyle on the verge of his major character improvement. The Vanishing Point is divided into three parts. Part One features Carlyle's unsuccessful attempt to meet Victoria in the city; Part Two covers Carlyle's nine years at Paradise Valley reserve; Part Three returns to the present and Carlyle's search for Victoria, expanding to feature Carlyle's search for himself. This structure introduces a considerably improved Carlyle a short time before his dramatic change in character. He is not quite the rigid, remote, task-oriented person who moved to Paradise Valley nine years previously. He hardly recognizes himself: "This wasn't really Carlyle Sinclair at all . . ." (*VP*, p. 5). The usual Carlyle Sinclair is an unappealing product of an upbringing which alienated him from himself and from others. His culture, as embodied in his Aunt Pearl, apparently taught him to deny his physical self, that is, to repress sexual feelings, to dull the senses, and generally to renounce the body in favour of an obsession with order and decorum. Societal forces manifest in such people as Old Kacky, the school teacher, effectively crushed Carlyle's individuality, almost "vanishing" him from himself (*VP*, p. 322). Throughout such socialization, no one was consistently close to Carlyle to demonstrate an alternative. The only person who had the chance to establish a longstanding bond with Carlyle was his father, but he was distant: "that was the way it had been . . . : 'you in your small corner and I in mine'" (*VP*, p. 336). It is no wonder that Carlyle developed, among other objectionable traits, that of refusing to acknowledge and deal with painful events in his past. He moved to Paradise Valley to escape the pain of his wife's death. Carlyle distances himself not only from civilization but from himself and from others.

Because of the way in which *The Vanishing Point* is structured, a later and different Carlyle is introduced at the beginning of the novel. After nine years in Paradise Valley, Carlyle exhibits admirable and attractive qualities. For example, his concern for old Esau demonstrates the warmth of which Carlyle is capable in his dealings with the Indians. Carlyle's fertile imagination and his sense of humour are also highlighted when he is introduced. It is a good day for Carlyle. It is the first day of spring, and he is going to visit Victoria. He formulates for his own amusement "Sinclair's Law of Diminishing Emotional Returns," saying that "cold climate ascetics--puritans--the shy and lonely ones" like himself are the greatest lovers because their lives are so "low key" that any kindness such as a gift of flowers, any contact such as lunch with a friend, any excitement such as the arrival of spring, inspires an exceptionally enthusiastic response because it is like a glass of water to a man on a desert (VP, p. 4). Carlyle's imagination and humour are evident again when he enters Esau's shack and the profusion of odours prompts him to consider smell as a performing art: "Maestro Sinclair bringing down his baton--three peremptory whiffs of wood smoke or deer musk, then a fart chord full and long from the wind section. Good old Sinclair's Fifth!" (VP, p. 6). Carlyle is initially refreshing; he does not seem to take himself too seriously.

After the initial positive impression, Carlyle impresses further because of the favourable comparison with most other whites associated with the reserves. Carlyle's predecessor, the Reverend Bob G. Dingle, was "totally incapable," and he "indulged himself in a sort of absent-minded masturbatory loving-kindness that . . . [bore] no fruit" (VP, p. 131). Dingle repeatedly said "'No-watch-es-nichuh,'" thinking that, as Archie Nicotine had told him, it meant "'You please me very much,'" when it actually meant "'Bullshit'" (VP, p. 151, p. 175, p. 175). Carlyle is nowhere near as inept or gullible, as his superior teaching epitomizes. He even earns Archie Nicotine's seal of approval: "'. . . I come to a conclusion--you're the teacher for Paradise'" (VP, p. 140). Carlyle's boss, Ian Fyfe, is "meticulously adequate" in the Indian Affairs department; he prefers bureaucratic procedure to personal involvement (VP, p. 87). His two most memorable expressions are "'[D]o not let yourself become too personally involved'" and "'We'll just have to see what transpires'" (VP, p. 121, p. 82). Fyfe is also objectionable because in his work with the Indians he imposes his cultural bias. Fyfe's Minimal Subsistence cookie, which the Indians hate, is made of oatmeal, which, as Carlyle says, "'is pretty well Scottish'"--like Fyfe (VP, p. 90). Furthermore, Fyfe is unappealing because, although he supports Carlyle's efforts to help the Stony band, he personally sees Indians as "terminal cases to be made comfortable as possible within the terms of the reserve system--the budget and the Indian Act--and the civil-service machinery" (VP, p. 91). By comparison, Carlyle's aspirations for the Stonies and his impatience with bureaucracy are admirable. Another white associated with the Stonies, Arthur Sheridan, spent thirty-five years dealing with Indians, but it "all [came] to nothing" (VP, p. 182). Sheridan's only accomplishment as Indian Agent was the Hanley Wolverines baseball team, "'[e]astern slopes champions three years in a row'" (VP, p. 182). When Carlyle suggests that the Stonies might attempt more agriculture than merely grazing horses, Sheridan becomes angry and says that thirty-five years have taught him that "'an Indian does as he damn pleases'" (VP, p. 179). When Carlyle replaces Sheridan as agent, improvements begin. Taking an idea from Archie Nicotine, Carlyle decides to pay the Indians for the work they do. Soon hay, oats, and vegetables are growing, and the barn, supply shed, corral, and fences are mended. Then Carlyle devises and implements a successful scheme which pays the Indians out of band funds to build houses for themselves. Carlyle's success at improving Paradise Valley reserve and the welfare of the Stony band inspires admiration.

Friendship with Sanders further attests to Carlyle's worth and thus causes more reader attachment to Carlyle. Sanders is closest to spokesman for the novel's ideas on how the Indians should be treated. That a character of such certified quality should find Carlyle worthy of friendship speaks well of Carlyle. When Sanders is introduced, a rare authorial comment bestows approval: "He had what Carlyle considered a 'cold eye'--which actually meant a mature or reliable one!" (VP, p. 127). Immediate flattering comparisons with Sheridan and Fyfe support this declaration. While Sheridan and Fyfe have nothing but cautionary things to say about the Stonies, Sanders has "praise too" (VP, p. 128). While Fyfe stammers an awkward excuse for Dr. Sanders' failure to visit Carlyle as scheduled, Sanders is frank: "'[B]een out with the X-ray unit--so--I tied one on'" (VP, p. 127). Unlike any other white, Sanders is personally involved with the Indians. His latent tuberculosis makes him "'a disease brother'" (VP, p. 129). Significantly, Carlyle sums up his own climactic character transformation as a change to being "personally involved" (VP, p. 388). On first meeting, Sanders gives Carlyle the following advice:

> "You'll hear everyone refer to them [the Stonies] as children. Horse shit! They are children, but with adult drives--grown-up hungers--mature weaknesses--envy--love of power--of their own children; they have vanity and--what's very--the key--a terrible feeling of inferiority. If you know that--and that they are child-like--then you won't give them too much of a load to carry; you won't rant at them because they failed to carry what you piled up on them. Don't expect too much of them. . . . Ever wonder what a shock it must be to someone--seeing himself in a mirror for the first time in his whole goddam life? That's what you are--to them. There's a phrase you'll hear them use a lot. . . . I'm ashamed. One way that's worked for me--give them praise--just if they have earned it. Be a good guardian." (VP, pp. 130-131)

Carlyle fails to follow Sanders' advice. His method of dealing with the Indians, as epitomized by his treatment of Victoria, is to consider them children and to "'keep right on demanding good deeds'" (VP, p. 240). After Carlyle finds Victoria in the city and she shuns him, he is driven to the realization that, in spite of Sanders' warning, he mirrored Victoria and the other Stonies with the mirror of white society, letting the Indians see themselves as backward and smaller than they actually were (VP, p. 354). Carlyle learns the hard way what Sanders had told him on their first meeting. During their friendship Sanders criticizes Carlyle for judging Dingle harshly and for questioning Sheridan tactlessly. Sanders suggests that Carlyle "'twin [his] pain with the other guy's'" (VP, p. 156). But not until Carlyle feels that he has failed with Victoria does he realize that "without twinning pain his compassion had been specious" (VP, p. 366). The last time that Sanders sees Carlyle, he advises Carlyle to treat the Stonies with love. Later, under the influence of the pounding Prairie Chicken Dance, Carlyle recognizes the general validity of Sanders' advice. This is the didactic climax of the novel. Carlyle realizes that he is responsible for his fellow man, that the compensation for the aloneness of being human is that man possesses the possibility of building "bridges between himself and other men so that he [can] walk from his own heart and into other hearts" (VP, p. 385). Sanders states nearly every important thing that Carlyle comes to learn. The technique of characterizing Carlyle by what another character, Sanders, says to him and does with him works well, for, if a character of Sanders' stature sees something valuable beneath the "Puritan bastard" in Carlyle, then the reader should too (VP, p. 169).

Despite Sanders' complimentary friendship, despite Carlyle's admirable attitudes and success compared with other whites, and despite Carlyle's introduction as an improved person, he does not inspire great concern for his welfare. Part of the problem is that the principal action, his search for Victoria, appears both unjustified and ridiculous. A nineteen-year-old woman quits nurses' training and her former teacher desperately searches for her, apparently to save her from what he considers the evils of the city and to convince her to re-enter training. Although such a search seems unjustified in that, as an adult, the woman should be able to make her own decisions, the way in which Carlyle's pursuit of Victoria is presented accentuates rather than underplays its indefensible nature. The search would have been more obviously motivated if, for example, Victoria's family had begged Carlyle to find their daughter, or if Victoria had seemed in some danger. As presented, however, Carlyle's seeking Victoria appears particularly inept because Victoria would not even have been "lost" if she had not been hiding from Carlyle. The almost hysterical search seems emotionally inflated and, therefore, ridiculous. Carlyle dashes from place to place searching with almost no assistance from anyone except officer Dan on a CSFA-TV children's program, and repeating his frantic refrain, "Little lost lamb, Victoria." He is even more absurd when he finds Victoria and discovers that she is pregnant and determined to go her own way:

> Little lost lamb soliciting--little lost lamb screeching Stony hate and obscenity on city streets, dark hair curtaining down her convulsing shoulders as she vomited in alleyways--little lost lamb left to freeze alone outside the beer parlour door--heat-cherried stove-pipe knocked loose and stoves tipped over in gay tag--little lost infant charred in the crib! Little lost lamb, Victoria! (VP, p. 367)

The obnoxious refrain is prominent not only by repetition but also by placement. It concludes two chapters, and it is the final line in Part One. It evokes several associations, all of them derogatory, although not devoid of irony. Because Carlyle sees himself as Jesus, the shepherd, searching for the one lamb gone astray from his flock, both the religious nature and the animal reference of "Little lost lamb, Victoria" connect Carlyle with Heally Richards, and subject Carlyle to the same damning criticism. Heally Richards regards his congregation as animals--as "razor-backs rooting and grunting," as cattle in a "stockyard," as turkeys about to "gobble" (VP, p. 346, p. 356, p. 357). Richards preaches without respect for his congregation and with an eye to his own needs. Similarly, Carlyle searches for Victoria out of some obscurely identified personal motivation which is actually inimicable to Victoria's well-being. While Carlyle's seeking must be misguided, it need not be taken to ridiculous extremes.

Carlyle also alienates reader sympathies because he is short on genuine compassion for people. Not only is he an unforgiving judge of Dingle and Sheridan, but he is equally as strict and demanding with the person to whom he supposedly is most attached, Victoria. When Victoria, the only person on the reservation ever to write senior matriculation examinations, fails English and algebra, Carlyle says to her mother, with Victoria present, "'The English is understandable, Susan . . . , but not the algebra. She had no right flunking that'" (VP, pp. 237-238). Such is Carlyle's praise for Victoria's outstanding work. Carlyle's lack of compassion is epitomized when he finds Victoria in the city and allows her to walk away from him to what he considers evil. Because Victoria is pregnant, Carlyle deems her a failure, and he abandons her. While Carlyle must lack compassion so that he can gain it, he must not be such a hard character that we do not care for him enough to hope for his improvement. Consider the difference if we had seen Carlyle's love for his wife, Grace. If we had seen Carlyle improve as his relationship with Grace progressed, and if we had seen Carlyle revert after Grace's death, then his compassion would have been demonstrated, and we would hope for its return. However, because of the inadequate effort to develop a sympathetic side to Carlyle's character, he remains primarily a stern taskmaster.

Carlyle fails to generate reader concern for his welfare for another reason: he is not always convincingly characterized. His memories, for example, do not seem natural. A few months with Aunt Pearl and a school year with Old Kacky are unlikely to affect Carlyle more than years with his father and more than marriage to Grace, yet Carlyle's memories feature Aunt Pearl and Old Kacky. The near-absence of Grace is bothersome. Grace's importance is established when Carlyle moves to Paradise Valley reserve to hide from the painful memories of her death. Because Carlyle's character change demands that he confront the influences which he had refused to acknowledge, it is strange that he should remember vividly Aunt Pearl and Old Kacky, and not remember his wife's death, the most recent and most traumatic experience for him. Carlyle is also unconvincing because some of the thoughts attributed to him do not seem consistent. For example, when the loss of Victoria shatters Carlyle, he thinks, "[I]t was so goddam ridiculous and unheard of: that Carlyle Sinclair wasn't" (VP, p. 323). Yet this thought follows immediately Carlyle's remembrance of his near "vanishment" by Old Kacky (VP, p. 322).

Carlyle is also not fully realized because he lacks the small touches that help to make a character convincing. He lacks distinguishing habits or mannerisms. While Fyfe has his flowers, his scotch, his biscuits, his "aye-he," his "personally involved," and his "transpires," Carlyle has only his fantasies and his frantic refrain "Little lost lamb, Victoria." This expression is so ludicrous to use for a woman, that, instead of increasing Carlyle's credibility, it diverts the reader's attention to Biblical associations and comparisons with Heally Richards, thus further detracting from Carlyle's individuality. Carlyle's physical description epitomizes his lack of individuality. Most characters receive striking physical descriptions. Heally Richards, tanned and dressed in white, is described as a photographic negative. Sanders is "a lean, sandy-haired man in his early forties" with high cheekbones and a "glossy softness" to his skin (VP, p. 127). Even Archie Nicotine's daughters receive the pithy description "such moon-faced truculence" (VP, p. 25). But what does Carlyle Sinclair look like?

The inadequacies in Carlyle's characterization neutralize the efforts to arouse reader concern for Carlyle. As a result, there is a flatness at the center of the novel, and a consequent lack of power in the climax.

The second compositional demand is met with little success. Victoria should be characterized in such a way that she gives rise to reader concern for her well-being. Victoria's apparent intelligence, her diligence at school work, her compassion for Esau, and her impressive success compared with the other Stonies may occasion a sympathetic reader response. But Victoria must also be a sufficiently complex character to enact credibly these worthy qualities. Furthermore, she should be complex enough to assist in explaining Carlyle's intense attraction to her and complex enough to seem capable of establishing a human bond of love with Carlyle at the climax of the novel. Victoria, however, is not characterized in convincing detail.

Part of the problem is the manner in which the narrative point of view is employed. Although it is the selective omniscient point of view, only Carlyle, to a lesser extent Heally Richards, and to an even lesser extent Archie Nicotine, are selected to disclose directly their thoughts and feelings. Thus the aspects of Victoria's character most likely to make her seem to come to life--her thoughts and feelings--are not directly revealed.

A related problem is that in Part One and Part Two Victoria is seen primarily from Carlyle's perspective, and Carlyle's view is distorted and superficial. In Part One every reference but one to Victoria is Carlyle's. The other is Archie's. When Carlyle calls Victoria the smartest child on the reserve, Archie says, "'No child'" (VP, p. 25). This effectively calls into question the validity of Carlyle's perspective. Carlyle regards Victoria, the woman, as a child. He also sees her as a symbol, a test case for the Indians' progress. In the process, Carlyle is vanishing Victoria from herself, from himself, and from the reader. The introduction of the prominent bridge symbol gives early warning of Carlyle's superficial view of Victoria. Carlyle has had so little success establishing honest contact with Victoria and the other Stonies that he thinks that he needs "some sort of suspension bridge that could carry hearts and minds across and into other hearts and minds" (VP, p. 12). Appropriately, Carlyle makes no substantial analysis of Victoria beyond the following:

> She was not withdrawn and cautiously careful like the others, but she did have a quiet, waiting quality. (VP, p. 216)

> What inexhaustible patience she had. That was her true strength--her real talent. She was capable of such stillness, the ability simply to be for so long a time. (VP, p. 59)

The principal avenue by which Victoria might be known is what she says. But she is taciturn and laconic. The waitress who says to Carlyle "'Your little girl hasn't got much to say . . .'" is right, for Victoria speaks on only six occasions. She does not speak until page 208, where she argues with Carlyle, her teacher, over her participation in the boys' Prairie Chicken Dance. She acquiesces to Carlyle's prohibition, happy to be allowed to ring the bell instead. When she speaks next, she tells Carlyle that his breakfast porridge smells like a wet sweater and that she would rather have bacon and eggs. She gets bacon and eggs but bows to Carlyle's insistence that she ask in a manner which white society would consider polite. Both of these childhood conversations emphasize that Victoria is strongly Stony but able to change and compromise. As an adult, Victoria speaks three times to Archie and once to Carlyle. When Archie finds Victoria working in a Greek's cafe and tells her of the plans to bring her grandfather to Heally Richards, she insists that Esau not be moved. When Archie finds her with the Catfaces, she is glad to see him, asks for his help, and says that she is ashamed, especially in front of Carlyle. When Archie again visits Victoria at the Catface's encampment, she communicates to Archie what he would call "the whole situation" by nodding, shaking her head, refusing to look at him, and uttering only one word. This is a testament to Victoria's taciturnity. When Carlyle finally finds Victoria, she says that she does not want his help and that she is ashamed. What Victoria says as an adult reveals that she takes extremely seriously the assumed judgement by Carlyle, white society, and her own family, for she is above all else ashamed, and she refuses to see Carlyle, ask white help, or return to the reserve. She is adamant. What Victoria says is not enough to make her a complex and convincing character, for she speaks rarely, and then briefly. If Victoria's character is to be effectively developed, what she says is crucial, for the narrative point of view does not reveal her thoughts and emotions, and Carlyle's view of her is distorted and superficial. However, Victoria is a rather uncommunicative character, so her character is largely uncommunicated to the reader.

As a result, some of Victoria's actions are not understandable, and her credibility is further eroded. Victoria studies hard, avoids pregnancy, enters nursing, becomes pregnant, quits the hospital, hides from Carlyle and her family, quits work at a restaurant when the owner propositions her, joins forces with Norman and Gloria Catface, sells herself, returns to the reserve with Archie, chooses Carlyle for a dance partner and sleeps with him. It is difficult to imagine Victoria descending from the pride of Paradise to a desperate hooker in three weeks. It is more difficult to understand Victoria's romance with Carlyle, for he forced her through school and into nursing, he abandoned her in the city, he ignored her when she returned to the reserve, and fear of him drove her to the level of the Catfaces. Victoria's characterization is inadequate to explain such behavior.

Thus, although Victoria possesses enough laudable traits to make her worthy of Carlyle's and our concern, she is not sufficiently complex to be convincing. Because of her indistinct characterization, it is difficult to feel a sense of urgency at her peril or to appreciate the frenzy of Carlyle's search. Not only does Victoria's characterization weaken the novel throughout, but it enervates the climax because Victoria's attraction to Carlyle is not readily explicable and because Victoria does not seem sufficiently genuine to establish the all-important "bridge" between herself and Carlyle.

The third compositional demand, that the theme be acceptable and convincing, is met with mixed success. The theme is most accurately described as two themes loosely joined. One theme is, to use the novel's terminology, that the vanishing point for individuals, races, and humanity is an illusion. Not only will humanity survive, it will progress. The other theme is that while western civilization generally produces people incapable of love, love is the key to life. The theme that love is the key to life is certainly acceptable, for the moral foundation of our culture is, at least nominally. love. This theme is convincing because Carlyle's salient change in character demonstrates it, his change in thought expresses it, and the prominent bridge symbol embodies it, even though the causes of Carlyle's previous inability to love are not so credible.

The message is delivered with the force of Carlyle's climactic revelation.

> Together they [Carlyle and his childhood friend, Mate] had discovered that they were both alien from and part of a living whole. The dry husk of a dead gopher, an abandoned garter snake skin, magpies, undertaker beetles, had taught them the terror of being human. But they knew that they were accountable to each other; the badger, the coyote, the kill-deer, the jack rabbit, the undertaker beetle, could not share their alien terror. They were not responsible for each other. Man was.
>
> Man lifted bridges from his own heart and into other hearts. That was the great and compensating distinction. . . . (VP, pp. 384-385)

Carlyle realizes simultaneously that he must not only be responsible for others, he must care for them. He compares himself unfavourably with Archie, for while Carlyle left Victoria in the city, Archie showed active concern for her and brought her back to the reserve. The other lessons which Carlyle learns are germane. He learns that he must respect the Indians, treating them as individuals, not as problems to be forced into moral boxes according to his needs, not as children to be coerced into improvement projects regardless of what they want. Carlyle also learns that he must know people more deeply, twinning his pain with theirs so that his compassion is genuine.

This is love. The novel calls it love, for the climactic dance, during which Carlyle and Victoria are united, ends thus: "Certain as birth or death or love, the faultless Prairie Chicken Dance was over and done" (VP, p. 386). Erich Fromm's formal definition of love is uncannily close to Carlyle's concluding thoughts.[5] Fromm defines love as "primarily giving, not receiving."[6] Its basic elements are care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge. Care is "active concern."[7] Responsibility is not a duty but the "response to the needs . . . of another human being." "Respect means the concern that the other person should grow and unfold as he is."[8] Knowledge is important because "[t]o respect a person is not possible without knowing him; care and responsibility would be blind if they were not guided by knowledge."[9] Fromm maintains that love is crucial because man "has emerged from the animal kingdom" and lost "prehuman harmony," yet he is also still part of nature and so must find a new harmony.[10] Man's recognition of his "separate, disunited existence" is "an unbearable prison."[11] The most effective solution is love.

This theme is additionally convincing in the novel because

Carlyle's character change demonstrates love, and it is a distinct improvement. Carlyle changes from treating Victoria as a child and a symbol of Indian progress to seeing her as a woman and an individual. Carlyle changes from denying his physical and emotional interest in Victoria to sleeping with her and planning to marry her. Carlyle's changed relationship with Victoria is epitomized when he begins to see her as "wearing night-gown with eyelet-embroidered bodice overlay of lace --daisy-white" but quickly replaces this distorted, romantic picture with reality: she is naked (VP, p. 387). Because Carlyle's character change occurs so near the end of the novel that there is little opportunity to reveal the fruits of the change, Carlyle's character and future behavior are suggested by his thoughts upon seeing a Stony child. Instead of judging the boy by white society's standards and finding him wanting, Carlyle views him with tenderness, and he values him. Instead of desiring to tell him what to do, Carlyle wants to work with him.

While the importance of love is effectively embodied in the characters, action, and thought of the novel, the professed causes of Carlyle's long-standing inability to love are weak. Carlyle says that he failed to love because "there must have grown unnoticed at first--a spent melancholy--a loosening tautness of mind--an original blinding flash of contempt . . . for all other men--for himself" (VP, p. 385). The cause of Carlyle's melancholy is probably his wife's death, for he occasionally mentions, after showing enthusiasm, the number of years since Grace's death. Nothing in Carlyle's background suggests itself as the cause of a "loosening tautness of mind." Similarly, no incident in Carlyle's past produced a "blinding flash of contempt" for people. Possibly, as Carlyle was slowly socialized by such people as Old Kacky, he acquired their low opinion of his worth, and he transferred his lack of self-love to other people. This is plausible but not shown. Carlyle's concluding explanation of his long-delayed change is also weak.

> Why had he taken so long to know? There must have been some hidden awareness--long unadmitted. But why hadn't he admitted it sooner--given himself to it--and to her [Victoria]? His life just hadn't taught him how. It had given him the wrong commandments: be loved--don't love; tell--don't ask; take--don't give. (VP, p. 388)

However, nothing in Carlyle's background commands him to be loved but not love, to take but not give. Moreover, Carlyle would normally be considered giving. He spends nine years on a reservation helping the Indians to the best of his ability, and he receives little personal return, for most of the Indians will not look him in the eye. He takes only in a peculiar and limited sense: he is coercing the Stonies into improving their lives. While Carlyle does not love, neither does he insist on being loved. Unlike these two commandments, the commandment "tell--don't ask" is directly applicable to Carlyle's behavior, for he usually tells the Stonies what to do rather than asking them what they want. Here Carlyle's background explains his behavior, for he treats the Stonies the way that Aunt Pearl and Old Kacky treated him. However, the generally unconvincing nature of the professed causes of Carlyle's inability to love weakens both Carlyle's character and the theme.

The theme that humanity will inevitably survive and progress is a grievous flaw in the novel. In the face of harsh reality, it is facile optimism. Worse, it is unconvincing because the symbolism unjustifiably extends the significance of Carlyle's growth and the Stonies' success to create an unmitigated comic resolution at odds with the novel's trenchant social criticism. On the realistic level, Carlyle's growth is credible. An Indian agent comes to know himself a bit better, admits his attraction to a young Indian woman, and begins to treat people with more love. Given Carlyle's lengthy time on the isolated reserve, given the pressure of his repressed memories and emotions, and given the latent natural enthusiasms of his childhood, it is not surprising that Carlyle can overcome the crippling influence of his background to the extent that he acknowledges his natural self, recognizes the desirability of love in dealing with people, and steps out of "the home envelope of self" to establish contact with Victoria (VP, p. 216). When Carlyle's growth is amplified by the symbols, it knows no bounds. The ruffed grouse's drumming which, early in the novel, wakes Carlyle with an invitation to join the living whole is, at the end of the novel, sounding inside Carlyle like his pulse, thus signifying that he has joined the living whole. The ruffed grouse and the drumming connect with the Prairie Chicken Dance and its drumming which help Carlyle "[shatter] time and self," that is, overcome his restrictive background and go beyond himself to love other people. Beulah Creek's overflowing also announces Carlyle's impressive growth, for Beulah overcomes a blockage caused by white society's technicians just as Carlyle overcomes the crippling effect of white society's socialization. Carlyle's growth is expressed in the broadest symbolic terms as the change from the dead of winter to the life of spring. Such a transformation is not credible for Carlyle or anyone else.

The symbolism also unjustifiably magnifies the Stonies' progress. When not exaggerated by symbols, the Stonies' success is reasonable. In spite of disease, ignorance, the reserve system, and negative white attitudes, the Stonies progress. When they are treated more like people and less like terminal wards of the state, school attendance improves from dismal to good, diet improves by supplementing bannock and too little elk with healthy vegetables, business improves from a bedraggled herd of underfed cattle to a healthy, expanded herd properly fed, and shelter improves for some families from shacks to houses. These improvements are credible because Alberta Indian bands have made such changes, and they are convincing because Archie's shrewdness and Carlyle's determination are a combination potent enough to spark such changes. The symbols, however, bespeak unqualified success. Old Esau saw the drying up of Beulah Creek as a sign that "'all happy days'" were gone; thus the overflowing of Beulah Creek suggests that good days have arrived in abundance for the Indians (VP, p. 8). This interpretation receives support from the original Biblical reference to Beulah:

> You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
> and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;
> but you shall be called My delight is in her,
> and your land Married [Beulah];
> for the Lord delights in you,
> and your land shall be married.[12]

If this is not triumph enough, Archie Nicotine gets his truck running. Two years of unsuccessful attempts to pass the Empress Hotel with enough money to purchase the piston rings and carburetor necessary to fix his truck raise the effort to a symbol of Indian progress. Archie's triumphant entrance announces with loud backfires of joy his and the other Indians' success. While Beulah Creek either flows or it does not, while Archie's truck either starts or it does not, reality and the trenchant social criticism of the novel declare that the Indians' progress must be gradual and qualified.

The notion that individuals, races, and humanity will inevitably survive grows, through a complex of symbols, from an incident in Carlyle's youth. When Old Kacky strapped Carlyle for showing individuality during a lesson on perspective, Carlyle, left alone in the office to recover, felt that he was vanishing from himself. "That was crazy enough to scare the shit out of a person! . . . Literally" (VP, p. 322). Defecating in Old Kacky's desk drawer is Carlyle's opposition to overweening authority. Then the incident, Old Kacky, Carlyle, and the vanishing point take on enlarged significance. Old Kacky's oatmeal porridge smell, to which Carlyle is extremely sensitive, connects Old Kacky with the oatmeal symbol and the motif of smell. Through Ian Fyfe and his Minimal Subsistence oatmeal cookies, oatmeal comes to symbolize the imposition of a cultural bias. Through the repetition of Esau's reprimand about boiling carbolic acid to smother the smell of the Stony students, utilization of the sense of smell is established as a distinguishing feature between those who are natural and those who are not. Thus Old Kacky represents western civilization's rigid socialization of the natural. Carlyle, although a complex character, is a representative victim. The vanishing point acquires increased significance when Mate, the student who is least afraid of Old Kacky, reminds Carlyle that aside from the conventions of art "'there isn't any vanishing point . . .'" (VP, p. 325). The vanishing point symbolizes the unnatural conventions which western civilization imposes on its members, thus making them smoothly functioning members of society but leaving them alienated from themselves and from other people. The significance of the symbol grows further when Mate compares the illusory nature of the vanishing point with the reversed and diminished image in a mirror. This makes the imposition of life denying conventions intercultural, for it connects the vanishing point with the mirror symbol and the backward symbol, both important symbols for white society's relation with the Indians. In the context of Carlyle's earlier fantasy about pulling the endangered Eskimo "back from the vanishing point," the symbol expands further to include physical annihilation (_VP_, p. 99). Thus an incident in a prairie elementary school art class expands to declare the impossibility of "vanishing" individuals, races, or humanity. While the incident may be credible, the expanded meaning is not. It joins with the amplified significance of Carlyle's growth and the Stonies' improvements to create an unconvincing theme and an unwarranted comic resolution which vitiates the previous effective social comment.

The Vanishing Point is principally the story of Carlyle Sinclair's search for Victoria Rider and for his natural self. Carlyle, Victoria, and the theme are the basic and crucial elements demanding primary attention. The style is strong--poetic for the nature descriptions, distinctly rhythmic for the preaching, sparse and dramatic for the conversations--but it is less important. Archie Nicotine's characterization is superb, but it too is secondary. Archie is lively enough to be entertaining and complex enough to be a credible influence. He does not degenerate into a caricature but remains an effective advisor and a convincing foil to Carlyle. Nor does Archie step out of his supporting role and dominate the novel, for Mitchell refrains from entering often or deeply into Archie's thoughts and feelings. But the success of the novel depends principally on the hero, the heroine, and the theme. Carlyle Sinclair is too much a symbolic victim of, and rebel against, white society to come to life as a character particularly worthy of our concern. Victoria Rider, taciturn and laconic, is a nebulous, indistinct heroine unable to fulfill effectively her roles as object of Carlyle's search and partner in the climax. The theme raises doubts which undermine the comic resolution. Although the message of love is successfully embodied in Carlyle's change, the proffered explanations of Carlyle's long inability to love are poorly grounded in his past, thus prompting doubts as to the influence that white society had on Carlyle and as to the validity of the novel's condemnation of western civilization. Similarly, while Carlyle's and the Stonies' progress is plausible, when it is extended by the symbols, the resulting theme that humanity will inevitably survive and progress is a comic conclusion produced by symbols and unsupported by reality or the first thirty-one chapters of _The Vanishing Point_.

CHAPTER V

W. O. Mitchell's writing talents do not show to best advantage in his novels. The weaknesses of his writing, such as his difficulty portraying rather ordinary middle-class males and characterizing women in detail, are emphasized in both The Kite and The Vanishing Point where they are crucial to each novel's degree of success. Furthermore, the strengths of Mitchell's writing often become liabilities in the novelistic context in which they appear. As an introduction to supporting these conclusions, it is worth noting the kinds of extended prose fiction available to Mitchell.

Most readers, critics, and, presumably, writers have a "novel-centered view of prose fiction" says Northrop Frye, but a more accurate and useful view recognizes four forms of extended prose fiction: the novel, the romance, the confession, and the anatomy.[1] W. O. Mitchell writes principally in the traditional novel form, when his writing talents lean more toward any of the other forms. The novel, says Frye, depicts "'real people,'" and it concentrates on "human character as it manifests itself in society."[2] "The novelist shows his exuberance either by an exhausting analysis of human relationships, as in Henry James, or of social phenomena, as in Tolstoy."[3] Mitchell's works depend on a realistic protagonist's growth, and human relationships are an essential element in this growth, but in The Kite and The Vanishing Point the protagonists and the romantic relationships are not effective. Mitchell is intensely interested in society, as is evidenced by the subplot of societal oppression and revenge in Who Has Seen the Wind, the contrast between Toronto and Shelby and between past and present in The Kite, and the criticism of Western civilization and urban living in The Vanishing Point. Mitchell's treatment of social phenomena, however, is more a righteous attack than a searching analysis. While Mitchell's concern for societal pressures is appropriate to the novel, his tendency toward partly realistic--partly stereotypic characterization and toward black and white presentation of social issues are more suited to the romance. The romance presents "stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. It is in the romance that we find Jung's libido, anima, and shadow reflected in the hero, heroine, and villain respectively."[4] The "idealized" characterization creates an "untamable" and "revolutionary" ambience appropriate to Mitchell's enthusiasm.[5] Mitchell's penchant for colourful characters, his autobiographical impulse, and his didactic propensity might all find expression in a confessional form of fiction, more commonly called autobiography or fictional autobiography.

> Nearly always some theoretical and intellectual interest in religion, politics, or art plays a leading role in the confession. It is his success in integrating his mind on such subjects that makes the author of a confession feel that his life [or his character's life] is worth writing about.[6]

Such a form is obviously amenable to Mitchell's didactic inclination. In Who Has Seen the Wind, despite open discussion of Berkeley and philosophical issues, Mitchell successfully embodies in the novel his ideas on the virtues of intuition and the necessity of responsibility. In The Kite, however, his philosophical statement is truncated, proclaiming a zest for life but failing to provide a moral context. In The Vanishing Point the belief that love is the answer to the problem of human existence but that Western civilization does not produce loving people is poorly integrated into the plot, and thus remains Mitchell's version of Fromm's The Art of Loving. As Frye says, the "interest in ideas and theoretical statements is alien to the genius of the novel proper, where the technical problem is to dissolve all theory into personal relationships."[7] Mitchell's novels reveal an interest in related moral and philosophical issues which would find better expression in a confession. But the form of extended prose fiction most suited to Mitchell's talents may be the anatomy, as typified by Sterne's Tristram Shandy. The anatomy "deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes," and, because the characters are "mouthpieces of the ideas they represent," the conflicting ideas and theories generate the working force or gripping power of the work.[8] The "loose-jointed narrative form . . . relies on the free play of intellectual fancy and the kind of humorous observation that produces caricature."[9] The anatomy is a "combination of fantasy and morality."[10] Its slight concern for societal concerns notwithstanding, the anatomy, even more than the romance or the confession, seems an appropriate venue for Mitchell's writing talents.

Mitchell, however, chose the novel, and, within that form, he chose a particular plot structure. The fourteen different plot forms sketched under three different headings by Norman Friedman help identify and place in context the specific nature of Mitchell's plots.[11] His plots are not plots of fortune: they are not action plots making us wonder "what happens next"; nor pathetic plots, such as in Tess of the D'Urbervilles, where "our long-range fears [for the protagonist] . . . materialize"; nor the tragic plot where "the tragic hero not only has . . . a hand in his own downfall but also [comes] to recognize that involvement"; nor the punitive plot where an admirably determined and clever protagonist attempts repugnant goals, and fails; nor the sentimental plot where "the long-range hopes which are aroused ultimately materialize" through no effort of the protagonist; nor the admiration plot where the hopes for the protagonist's change in fortune are fulfilled by his phenomenal efforts. Mitchell's novels feature a plot of character, the maturing plot, combined with a plot of thought, the education plot. In his plots of character, Mitchell does not use the reform plot where the protagonist's thought is sufficient from the beginning but his will is weak; nor the testing plot where a good protagonist is pressured to compromise his noble character; nor the degeneration plot where the utterly disillusioned protagonist is unable to piece together his life. Rather Mitchell employs the maturing plot where a sympathetic protagonist has mistaken goals either through "inexperience" or "wrongheadedness." This most popular plot of character depends upon a "crucial element of choice, of coming finally to a radical decision" which changes the protagonist for the good. The natural relationship of thought to behavior, and the didactic propensity in Mitchell's novels, blend this maturing plot with the education plot where there is "a change in thought for the better in terms of the protagonist's conceptions, beliefs, and attitudes," but the character has insufficient time "to demonstrate the effects of this beneficial change." In Who Has Seen the Wind Brian is initially a naturally ignorant and egocentric four year-old. His decision at the age of ten to assume responsibility for his mother and family marks his climactic change in character, an improvement which he demonstrates in his consideration for his mother, his assistance to his brother, his respect for his grandmother, and, finally, his decision to become a "'dirt doctor'" (W, p. 295). In his intellectual development, Brian changes from seeing God as a personal avenger to seeing Him manifest in nature as a force indifferent to man's wishes. Brian also believes that he will discover the ultimate meaning of life by reason, not by intuition. The Kite too features an education plot combined with a maturing plot. David Lang's principal change is one of thought from being obsessed with unessential deadlines to realizing that the important deadline, his death, means that he should "never settle for anything less" than living his life to the fullest (K, p. 210). David also changes in character, growing more relaxed, more sincere, more sociable and family oriented as he settles into Shelby, becomes involved with Daddy Sherry and the Maclean family, and decides to marry Helen. The Vanishing Point also features a maturing plot combined with an education plot. Carlyle Sinclair's dancing and sleeping with Victoria signal his change from being a remote, paternalistic, and subtly contemptuous "'Puritan bastard'" (VP, p. 156). He has little opportunity to give other evidence of his change in character, but his change in thought reinforces this change because he realizes the virtues of responsibility, respect, care, patience, giving--in short, love.

The maturing and education plots emphasize weaknesses in Mitchell's fictional technique. The plots require a convincing protagonist who is flawed enough to warrant melioration but not so flawed as to repulse the reader's sympathies. Mitchell has difficulty creating such protagonists probably because the characters embody the very undesirable qualities against which Mitchell is writing. Thus David Lang is a poorly realized, somewhat objectionable protagonist who is overshadowed by Daddy Sherry, the agent of his change. Carlyle Sinclair is closer to neutral. His introduction only days before his major positive change in character, his complimentary friendship with Sanders, and his favourable comparison with most other whites enhance his appeal, but his ludicrous and unwarranted search for Victoria, his lack of compassion, and the gaps in his character neutralize the positive elements of his portrayal. Mitchell also has difficulty portraying women, and women are crucial to the growth of the protagonists in *The Kite* and *The Vanishing Point*. Helen Maclean is primarily a function, too forward, too personal, too romantic to be credible. And Victoria Rider is a victim of the fallacy of imitative form: because she has a quiet, waiting quality, she says and does little, and thus the reader is kept waiting for her character to be developed to a degree appropriate to her important role in the novel. *Who Has Seen the Wind*, Mitchell's most successful novel, escapes these pitfalls in characterizing the hero and the heroine because of Brian's youth.

Not only do the novels emphasize weaknesses in Mitchell's craft of fiction, but they turn some of the strengths of Mitchell's writing into liabilities. As the Saint Sammy-Bent Candy chapter in *Who Has Seen the Wind* illustrates, Mitchell is a superb teller of tales, but, in the context of the novel, this talent can become a detriment. The tale of the Lord's defense of Saint Sammy and of His punishment of Bent Candy is powerfully comic. Saint Sammy is completely sympathetic; Bent Candy is totally unsympathetic. Saint Sammy is an innocent victim of the depression, a sincere and harmless old man whose mixture of Biblical language and prairie speech is delightfully amusing. Bent Candy is an undeserving victor of the depression, a repugnant religious hypocrite, and a man consumed by greed, intent on forcing Saint Sammy to part with the

Clydesdales which he, the powerful "Flax King," covets (W, p. 264). With a great wind, the Lord destroys Bent Candy's new red barn. Thus punished, Bent Candy lets Saint Sammy and the Clydes live in peace. The scope of the comedy depends on the Lord's creating the storm. Although Saint Sammy's eccentric character suggests that the Lord's involvement might be only in his mind, the narrator shares with Saint Sammy and Brian the belief that the Lord purposely destroys the barn. Like Saint Sammy and Brian, the narrator identifies the wind with the Lord.[12] He personifies the wind as "solid as the push of a hand" (W, p. 270). When the storm is past, the narrator begins, "The wind was discreet in the grass . . ." (W, p. 272). The use of "discreet" epitomizes Mitchell's stylistic precision, neatly describing the scene, personifying the wind, and placing the narrator's sympathies. It is not surprising that the narrator identifies the wind with God because the tale is like a parable, which encourages such associations, and because the wind is symbolic of God throughout the novel. Although discreet, the narrator makes his belief explicit when he says, "Certainly the Lord's vengeance had been enough to give a gopher the heartburn" (W, p. 272). Although this might appear to be Saint Sammy's comment because he believed earlier that the "vengeance of the Lord would be enough to give a gopher the heartburn," it is the narrator's comment on Saint Sammy's prediction (W, p. 265). The word "certainly" suggests a doubt which Saint Sammy never had and a confirmation which he does not need. Moreover, the sentence occurs in the long, post-storm passage which, except for one sentence from Brian's perspective and two sentences from Bent Candy's perspective, is written entirely from the omniscient point of view. The tale ends in broad comedy. The Lord justly punishes Bent Candy and rightfully protects Saint Sammy. However, Mitchell includes a masterful touch to keep the tale from being too neat: Bent Candy's acquiescence is, true to character, not pious contrition, but, like his fifteen years as Deacon and his proposed expenditure on church pews, it is religious insurance.

While the Saint Sammy-Bent Candy episode is an effective comic tale, it is detrimental to the novel. It is irrelevant to the plot of Brian's growth in thought and character. The first time that Brian visits Saint Sammy, he concludes that the answer to the ultimate meaning of life "couldn't come closer through a crazy man gone crazy from the prairie" (W, p. 199). Brian later returns to see Saint Sammy in an effort to recapture the lost transcendental feeling, but Brian soon "[returns] sadly home" (W, p. 252). He is finished with Saint Sammy. Brian's third and final visit to Saint Sammy is superfluous; he never analyzes the events, and he apparently learns nothing from them. Although delightful and entertaining, the episode is also irrelevant to the reader in that its declaration that a fey, old eccentric such as Saint Sammy may be more truly religious than a seeming pillar of the church such as Bent Candy merely reiterates the point about religious hypocrisy which has already been made by contrasting the Reverend Mr. Hislop with Mr. Powelly and Mrs. Abercrombie. Worse than irrelevant, the tale is harmful to the novel because it contradicts what Brian learns. The tale claims that the Lord protects the innocent and punishes the guilty on earth. But throughout Who Has Seen the Wind Brian learns that God is neutral in nature and in social affairs, and, therefore, if man wishes to see justice, he must work for it himself. The theme of the tale would undercut the significance of the Young Ben's actions in the natural realm, diminish the importance of Miss Thompson's and Mr. Digby's work in the social sphere, and depreciate Brian's major change in thought and character. Thus the finely wrought comic tale is a liability in the context of the novel.

As Daddy Sherry in The Kite illustrates, Mitchell can create vivid and unique characters--what Michael Hornyansky calls "Mitchell types"[13]--but, in the context of the novel, this strength can become a weakness. Daddy Sherry is a dynamic mixture of realistic and symbolic characterization. The complexity of his bad days is realistic. Daddy's bad days are intentional yet also against his will. Daddy admits to intentional bad days when he says that he "'kind of slipped off'" on Mr. Suttee, the oil agent (K, p. 116). He did so because it eased him, like taking off his boots. Significantly, Daddy seems to have heard what Mr. Suttee had to say, for he babbles about Ramrod's being buried in Paradise Valley, the sight of Mr. Suttee's oil company's interests. Yet Daddy clearly has had days beyond his control, the best example being the day that David met him. Significantly, when David sees him for the second time, Daddy remembers nothing of the first visit. No one--probably including Daddy Sherry--seems to be able to distinguish clearly the unintentional from the intentional bad days.

Daddy's conversation is equally realistic, creating a convincing picture of a mind at work.

> "Belva!" . . .
> "Yes, Daddy."
> "This fellah--Mr. . . ."
> "Lang," she supplied.
> "Doin' a story about me." His eyes slid to David.
> "Straight or water?"
> "Hmh?"
> "Your Scotch."
> "Oh--water." (K, p. 96)

The statement not comprehended--or else misinterpreted--is Mitchell's favourite technique for creating the impression through conversation of minds at work. With Daddy Sherry this technique develops interesting and convincing variations, for Daddy deliberately misleads people. He purposely misinterprets. When Mrs. Clifford says, "'Give me the gun,'" Daddy creates problems by pretending that she wants to keep his rifle forever. Daddy strategically fights battles that he does not care about winning so that they camouflage his true intentions. When Mrs. Clifford orders him to pick Saskatoons behind the power house, Daddy argues for Haggerty's coulee, but merely as a smoke screen for his plans to disappear to Bailey's barn. Daddy keeps hidden agendas. As he argues with Keith about swinging on the trapeze, he intends to trap Keith into proving his friendship by revealing where Mrs. Clifford hid the rifle. Daddy even fakes senility. When he rambles on about the necessity of shooting buffalo to make pemmican for the coming winter, he is hoping to catch Keith up in his thinking and thus trick Keith into revealing where Mrs. Clifford hid the rifle. But when Daddy carelessly mentions the necessity for Saskatoons in the pemmican, Keith turns the tables on him by suggesting berry picking, and Daddy sucks in his breath in astonished defeat.

While such elements of Daddy's characterization as the complex bad days and the devious conversations suggest a realistic character, Daddy is also a symbol representing the life force. He is closely connected with the realm of nature. His introduction, for example, is replete with metaphors connecting him with the plant world. He appears to "[spear] directly from the floor beneath, through the bed and straight up," his "stalk neck" and "dandelion down hair" turning toward David "with the reluctance of tropism" (K, p. 31). Mr. Spicer and Miss Tinsley emphasize Daddy's intimate connection with the cycle of the seasons. Mr. Spicer says, "'Winter time he holes up at home--hibernates like a grizzly. But as soon as the sky is blue and the run off starts--down town every Saturday morning. Law nature'" (K, p. 25). Miss Tinsley holds the following conversation with David:

> "A lot of people in the district put in their crops by him."
> "Oh--does he predict the weather?"
> "No. It isn't that--that clear for him--he feels it--but he seems to be only partly aware of it himself."
> "I see."
> "It's more like sap rising in a tree--or leaves yellowing and turning brittle in the fall."
> (K, p. 95)

Naturally Daddy finds his plan to die in the spring impossible. While Daddy's longevity and enthusiasm lend support to considering him a symbol of the life force, Daddy is simultaneously a realistic character whose unique life style depends in large part on his vivid recognition of his mortality.

Yet Daddy is somewhat of a liability in The Kite. Compared to David, he is so dynamic that he shifts the focus of interest from David, the protagonist, to himself. Not all of the problem is David's poor characterization. Partly because Daddy is the type of the cranky, eccentric old man and the symbol of the life force, he generates the "intensity," the "untamable" something which Frye noted in romantic characterizations.[14] Daddy has this power because we do not hold him strictly to reality. We do not question that he could or would swing from a trapeze. Nor do we complain that his refusal to shoot at Old Croaker or any other geese spoils the goose hunt for the three fellows who kindly organized it. Daddy has free rein, captures the spotlight, and thus splits the novel. More important, once interest focuses on Daddy Sherry, he proves an unsatisfactory replacement for the protagonist. Daddy is a dynamic admixture of the realistic and the symbolic, but, possibly because of the very romantic element that makes him so attractive, he lacks the depth to reward reader interest with something more substantial than comedy. The revelation that Daddy was too busy living to turn his days into history is an interesting insight presented in an effective manner, and, as such, it stands out in The Kite, for Mitchell generally is not concerned with exploring the character of Daddy Sherry.

As Heally Richards and the attempt to save Esau in The Vanishing Point illustrate, successfully realized characters and successfully told stories are often integrated, but ineffectively so, with the main flow of the novel. The Reverend Heally Richards is woven into Carlyle Sinclair's story. The novel's first obvious conflict revolves around Heally Richards. Archie Nicotine wants him to come to Paradise Valley reserve to attempt to cure Esau and other Stonies, but Carlyle paternalistically forbids Archie to invite the faith healer to the reserve. Thereafter, Archie connects Carlyle and Richards through the subplot, the attempt to miraculously save Esau from tuberculosis, until Carlyle meets Heally Richards and attends the preacher's climactic performance in the Rally for Jesus. Listening to Heally Richards, Carlyle gains the pivotal insight in his change in thought and character: he, like Heally Richards and like his Aunt Pearl, has "no compassion halo." He orders people "into a moral box to suit himself only--not them" (VP, p. 354). Carlyle's climactic, concluding realization is this insight expanded from compassion and respect to include all of the facets of love. Heally

Richards is also connected to the novel's thematic concerns by symbolism. He has pure white hair, white eyebrows, white eyelashes; he wears a pure white suit, drives a pure white Cadillac, and preaches from a pure white pulpit. But as Heally Richards' obvious hypocrisy attests, white is impure. And as Archie Nicotine never lets us forget, white also describes a race. Aunt Pearl is a representative of white civilization. Her name is white; even her stool is white. Heally Richards, like Aunt Pearl, is a prime representative of white civilization, a way of life which is described as wrong or backward. Carlyle realizes that he and his culture have life's priorities wrong when, wishing to change, he wishes for Indian spirits to "contrary the backward" (VP, p. 14). Heally Richards is also backward. The first time that Archie sees the preacher, Archie is reminded of the Indian stories of crazy backward people who would do everything possible in reverse. The striking description of Heally Richards as a "'photograph negative'" combines the white symbolism and the backward symbolism (VP, p. 73). Heally Richards' defeat, like Carlyle's victory, is a defeat for white civilization.

The story of the attempt to save Esau is also intertwined with Carlyle's story. Esau early teaches Carlyle an important lesson which, had Carlyle been ready, would have sparked the transformation which took so long: boiling carbolic acid in the classroom is disrespectful, for whites smell as bad to reds as reds do to whites. Esau is also part of Carlyle's life because, in Carlyle's attempt to solve the problems on the reserve, Esau represents the no longer viable alternative of returning to the way of life lived before the coming of white civilization. Esau, essential to the subplot, connects with Carlyle in numerous other ways. As examples, Archie's plan to have Heally Richards visit the reserve and cure Esau occasions a classic display of Carlyle's paternalism, and, when Esau is transported to the city, Carlyle is present at his death.

Although the attempt to cure Esau, and the portrait of Heally Richards, are both integrated with the main story of the novel, the integration does not work to good effect. Esau is used for the humorous and comic downfall of Heally Richards. Reducing Esau to a device depreciates Carlyle's and Victoria's concern for the old man. It dismisses Esau's longing for the old days. It reduces Esau from a convincing victim of white carelessness and red stubbornness to a joke. Heally Richards is also a liability in Part Three of The Vanishing Point because he diverts attention from Carlyle. This is partly a problem of structure and partly a problem of point of view. Heally Richards steps to the fore in the opening scene--indeed, the opening line--of Part Three: "'I'd like to pay this man's fine'" (VP, p. 247). It is fitting that Heally Richards performs Carlyle's customary function of paying Archie Nicotine's bail because for the next three chapters Richards replaces Carlyle as the focus of attention. First Heally Richards plans for the special performance saving Esau, then Heally Richards preaches at the Rally for Jesus, and then Heally Richards reminisces about his life. After Carlyle reclaims the novel with his remembrances, Heally Richards often claims our attention because the selective omniscient point of view allows a dynamic, interior view of his mental and emotional processes. The problem is epitomized by Chapter 29. Here Richards' triumphant performance turns to utter defeat, and Carlyle learns that like Heally Richards he has shown little compassion or respect in dealing with people. Three pages are from Carlyle's point of view; twelve pages are from Heally Richards' point of view. In Part Three of The Vanishing Point, when attention should be focusing on Carlyle, attention often shifts to Heally Richards. Thus Heally Richards as well as the attempt to cure Esau are part of Carlyle's development, but not efficacious parts. Richards' connection with Carlyle is more mechanical than integral. And it is not kept in fitting proportion, for the faith healer overshadows Carlyle for a large portion of the final section of the novel. Esau and the attempt to save him from tuberculosis are also factors in Carlyle's life, but, in the end, they are reduced to a mechanism for Heally Richards' ruin.

W. O. Mitchell's writing talents seem ill-suited to the novel. In each of his novels, there are colourful romantic characters trying to dominate the work, and there are optimistic romantic themes contradicting the realism. In Who Has Seen the Wind, the Ben is an entertaining, rascally misfit whose stand against the ghosts Joe Pivott and Ollie Gatenby has nothing to do with Brian's development in thought and character. The Ben and the other romantic characters of the subplot are part of a wonderfully comic conclusion to the secondary action when the evil Mrs. Abercrombie is defeated, but the meretricious way in which good triumphs contradicts the hard nature of reality which Brian learns in the main action of the novel. In The Kite, Daddy Sherry is such a dynamic and exceptional character that he upstages David, but, when he has captured the spotlight, he is, not surprisingly for a romantic character, unable to provide the depth of insight appropriate to a novel which professes to reveal the secret to living well. To "never settle for anything less" than living life to the fullest is an exhortation which specifies the desire but not the method, and is thus a theme more suited to an idealistic romance than a realistic novel (K, p. 210). The

Reverend Heally Richards is very much in the same character tradition as Saint Sammy, the Ben, and Daddy Sherry. This is especially noticeable because the attempt to develop the faith healer into a more complex character creates the weakest chapter in The Vanishing Point. The description of Richards' childhood in Florida and of his trials and tribulations as an adult is so severely condensed that it is neither poignant nor persuasive, as it may have been if presented in scene rather than summary. While The Vanishing Point, as the title suggests, depends upon conditions being so bad that individuals and races seem about to vanish, the symbolism extends the significance of events to declare that individuals, races, and humanity will never vanish, but survive and progress. This is an optimistic, romantic theme unsupported by reality and the events of the novel. Mitchell's irresistible urge to affirm life and his propensity for colourful romantic characters combine with his determination to include these in a novelistic format to create works in which the parts are greater than the whole.

NOTES

Chapter I

[1] The difference between mimetic and didactic works is a generally recognized critical distinction, but the terms vary. Northrop Frye, for example, distinguishes between "fictional modes" and "thematic modes" in his first essay in Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957). My terms come specifically from two essays by Elder Olson, "William Empson, Contemporary Criticism, and Poetic Diction" and "A Dialogue on Symbolism," in Critics and Criticism, ed. R. S. Crane (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1952), especially pp. 63-68 and pp. 589-594.

[2] R. S. Crane, "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones," in Critics and Criticism, ed. R. S. Crane (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 622.

[3] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 163.

[4] M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, Third Edition (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), p. 65.

[5] Crane, p. 622.

[6] Crane, p. 620.

[7] Norman Friedman, "Forms of the Plot," in The Theory of the Novel, ed. Philip Stevick (New York: The Free Press-Macmillan, 1967), p. 154. My description of how to determine the plot and the form of the plot is taken from Friedman's article, particularly pages 154-156.

[8] M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953), pp. 3-29. See also Elder Olson, "An Outline of Poetic Theory," in Critics and Criticism, ed. R. S. Crane (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 546-552, and Wayne C. Booth, Critical Understanding (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 54-57.

[9] Dick Harrison, Unnamed Country (Edmonton: Univ. of Alberta Press, 1977), p. 155.

[10] Ken Mitchell, "The Universality of W. O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind*," *Lakehead University Review*, 4, No. 1 (1971), 26-40; Robin Mathews, *Canadian Literature: Surrender or Revolution* (Toronto: Steel Rail Educational Publishing, 1978), pp. 109-118; Ronald Sutherland, "Children of the Changing Wind," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 5 (1970), 3-11; William H. New, "A Feeling of Completion: Aspects of W. O. Mitchell," *Canadian Literature*, 17 (1963), 22-33; Catherine McLay, "*The Kite*: A Study in Immortality," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 2 (1973), 43-48; Catherine McLay, "*The Vanishing Point*: From Alienation to Faith," TS intended for The Canadian Novel series, Vol. III, 1979, ed. John Moss; Danald R. Bartlett, "Dumplings and Dignity," *Canadian Literature*, 77 (1978), 73-80. In addition, Arthur L. Phelps discusses *Who Has Seen the Wind* in a short essay in his *Canadian Writers* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1951), Warren Tallman uses the novel in his analysis of Canadian literature in his essay "Wolf in the Snow" in *A Choice of Critics*, ed. George Woodcock (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), and David Williams discusses the native question in *The Vanishing Point* in his article "The Indian Our Ancestor," *Dalhousie Review*, 58 (1978). Three masters theses have been completed on Mitchell's novels: Irene Hanson, "W. O. Mitchell and Robert Kroetsch; Two Prairie Humorists," Diss. Idaho State Univ. 1966; Tamara Lyn Hulet, "The Sense of Place in W. O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind*, Diss. Brigham Young Univ. 1978; Bruce Potter, "Through the Bubble: A Study of the Theme of Identity in the Novels of W. O. Mitchell," Diss. Univ. of Calgary 1977. Mitchell's novels are also treated in three general studies: Edward McCourt, *The Canadian West in Fiction*, rev. ed. (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970); Laurence Ricou, *Vertical Man/Horizontal World* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1973); Dick Harrison, *Unnamed Country* (Edmonton: Univ. of Alberta Press, 1977).

Chapter II

[1] W. O. Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1947), p. 169. Subsequent references to *W* will be included in the text.

[2] "Wolf in the Snow," in *A Choice of Critics*, ed. George Woodcock (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 56 and 57.

[3] Robin Mathews, *Canadian Literature: Surrender or Revolution* (Toronto: Steel Rail Educational Publishing, 1978), p. 115.

[4] "The Universality of W. O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind*," *Lakehead University Review*, 4, No. 1 (1971), 27.

[5] Mathews, pp. 114-115.

[6] Mathews, p. 113 and p. 112.

Chapter III

[1] W. O. Mitchell, The Kite (Toronto: Macmillan, 1962), p. 28. Subsequent references to K will be included in the text. Quotation marks will be used around "secret" because Daddy Sherry does not actually have a secret that he is keeping.

[2] Catherine McLay, "W. O. Mitchell's The Kite: A Study in Immortality," Journal of Canadian Fiction, 2 (1973), 43-44.

Chapter IV

[1] W. O. Mitchell, The Vanishing Point (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 156. Subsequent references to VP will be included in the text.

[2] Carlyle's climactic thoughts begin thus: "He did belong with them" (VP, p. 384). He agrees with Sanders that "the real aliens" are not the Stonies but the city dwellers (VP, p. 185).

[3] The centrality of "building bridges" among people and races is established early in The Vanishing Point (pp. 12-13, p. 16). It is directly reinforced throughout by symbolic use (p. 203, p. 216), and it is constantly kept in the fore by frequent references to the Spray River suspension bridge connecting the two worlds of the novel. It is the operative symbol of the climax (p. 385).

[4] Donald Cameron, Conversations with Canadian Novelists (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 61-62.

[5] In an interview with this writer in July, 1979, W. O. Mitchell said that he had read and admired The Art of Loving.

[6] Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving, World Perspectives:9 (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 22.

[7] Fromm, p. 26.

[8] Fromm, p. 28.

[9] Fromm, p. 29.

[10] Fromm, p. 7.

[11] Fromm, p. 8.

[12] Isaiah 62:4.

Chapter V

[1] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 304. The four forms of fiction are discussed, pp. 303-314.

[2] Frye, p. 304, p. 308.

[3] Frye, p. 311.

[4] Frye, p. 304.

[5] Frye, p. 304, p. 304, p. 305.

[6] Frye, p. 308.

[7] Frye, p. 308.

[8] Frye, p. 309.

[9] Frye, pp. 309-310.

[10] Frye, p. 310.

[11] Norman Friedman, "Forms of the Plot," in *The Theory of the Novel*, ed. Philip Stevick (New York: Free Press-Macmillan, 1967), pp. 145-166. The plot forms are described pp. 157-165. Besides the eleven forms mentioned in this thesis, there ~~are~~ three additional plots of thought: the revelation plot in which the protagonist remedies his "ignorance concerning the essential facts of his situation," the affective plot in which the protagonist comes to see another person in a truer light, and the disillusionment plot in which the protagonist loses his initial faith in a particular set of ideals.

[12] Saint Sammy says, "'The glory of the Lord come outa the East an' His voice was the wind a comin' over the prairie's far rim!'" (*W*, pp. 267-268). Brian hears the "voice" of the wind "singing," he

feels it "snatch" at his breath, and he sees dust "licked up" by "the Lord's wind" (W, p. 269, p. 270, p. 270, p. 272).

[13] "Countries of the Mind," Tamarack Review, 26 (1963), 68.

[14] Frye, p. 304.

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